DISCOVER *the* WORLD *through* MUSIC

# SONGLINES

## AFRICA SPECIAL
## SALIF KEITA
*The 'Golden Voice of Africa' is officially back!*

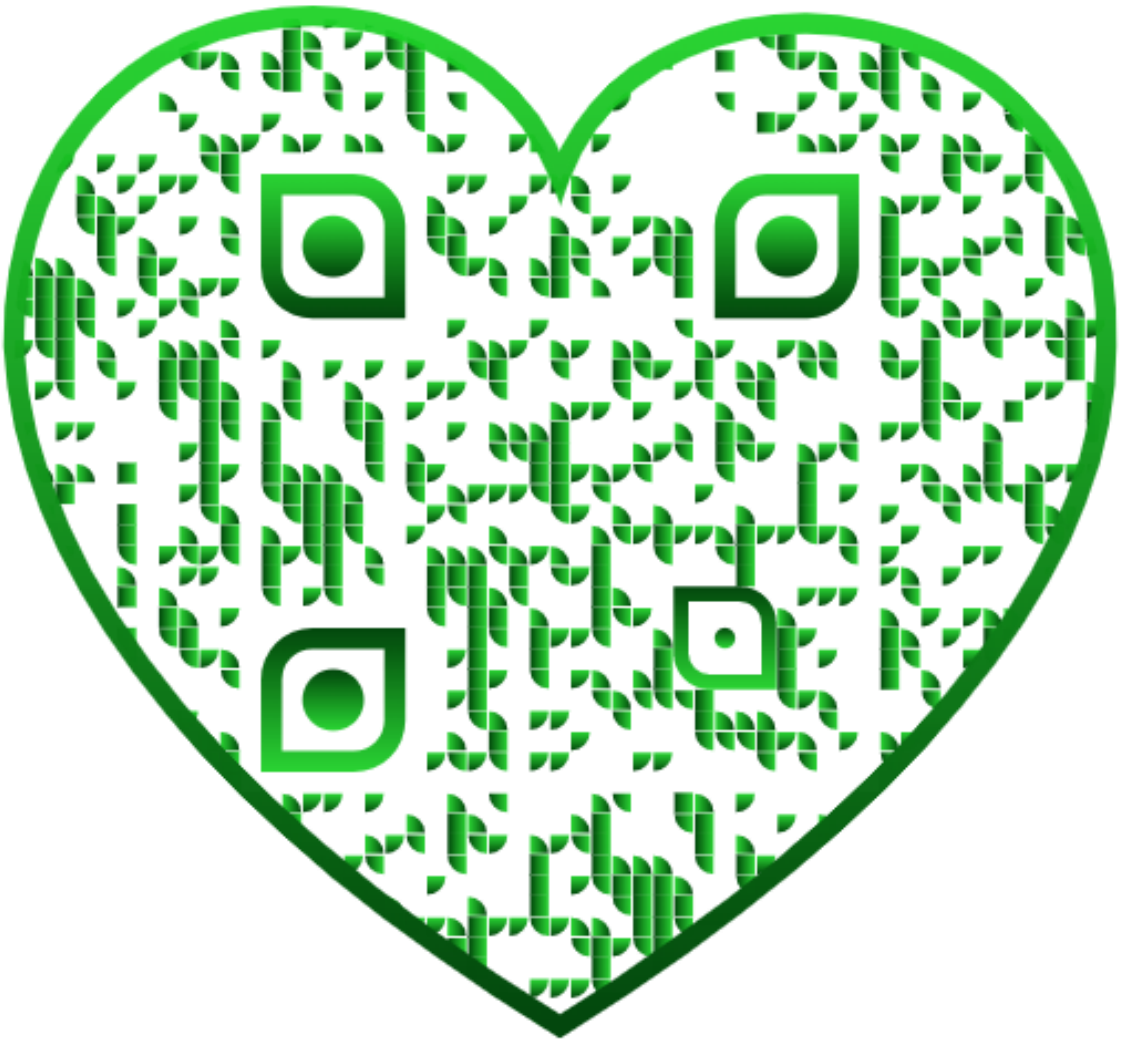
**PLUS** THE JOY • **FRANCK BIYONG**
**THE ZAWOSE QUEENS** • LADY DONLI
DEF MAMA DEF • **ABDULLAH IBRAHIM**

## THE BANJO SUMMIT
**Rhiannon Giddens** and **Béla Fleck** discuss everything banjo

HERMANOS GUTIÉRREZ
**ARS NOVA NAPOLI**
JAMZ SUPERNOVA
**RAGHU DIXIT**
ASHA PUTHLI
**MARDI GRAS IN LOUISIANA**

**Free** album download on **page 44**

ISSUE 199
JULY 2024
songlines.co.uk
facebook.com/songlines



24 WOMEX

WORLDWIDE | MUSIC | EXPO

© Anna Tréa at WOMEX 23 by Eric van Nieuwland

# Register now

Smart Rate until 28 June

womex.com

# Throw down your heart

This has been mentioned here before, but it's worth reiterating. When the Grammys introduced their inaugural award for Best African Music Performance this year, all nominees were from Nigeria or South Africa and all songs were sung entirely or largely in English. Hopefully our 'Africa Special' will show how narrow a view this is of a whole continent's worth of creativity. I'm sure a lot of you are familiar with Salif Keita already, but upon his recent comeback we can't be more thrilled to have him on our cover – especially as his eagerly awaited new acoustic album is a belter. But we also want to show you some of the lesser-known gems from Africa. The Joy are getting a lot of hype and all of it is deserved; I don't mind declaring them as natural heirs to Ladysmith Black Mambazo (if LBM ever break up that is!). Franck Biyong is no newcomer but his latest is sure to put him on the map, a tribute to African greats like Manu Dibango, Fela Kuti and Le Grand Kallé that is much more than mere homage. Lady Donli and Def Mama Def veer more towards modern pop and R&B but don't let that fool you, these are women that shouldn't be boxed in – just listen to Lady Donli's Afrobeat-tastic track on our compilation – and show that tags like Afropop or Afrobeats are not always harbingers of commercially minded music. Lastly, we must mention The Zawose Queens, the daughter and granddaughter of Hukwe Zawose who are breaking out on their own with a mix of traditional and future-facing Tanzanian sounds. They are also linked to our 'Banjo Summit' symposium with Rhiannon Giddens and Béla Fleck, as the latter recorded with Leah Zawose in Tanzania while making his 2008 documentary *Throw Down Your Heart*. That documentary and the banjo's road to becoming "the quintessential American instrument" are all debated during a fascinating discussion.

We also need to say farewell to Tatiana Rucinska, who has been our listings editor since 2002. We have made a tough choice to remove our *Gig Guide* beginning with the issue to follow. The *Gig Guide* has been an essential tool for many of our readers for years but we need to adapt to modern times, and it can't be denied that it has become easier to find out information about upcoming gigs through Google, Facebook, emails and other means. The upshot of this is that we now have even more space for even bigger in-depth features, so expect some very exciting articles in the issues to come. In the meantime, we just want to say a huge thank you to Tatiana who has been such an important part of *Songlines* over the years.

*Russ Slater Johnson, Editor*

## CONTRIBUTORS THIS ISSUE INCLUDE

**Evangeline Kim**
Evangeline is a cultural critic who writes about global performing and visual arts; she's also a management adviser. She travels to Fes, Morocco for an unforgettable festival of Sufi culture on p71

**Pierre Cuny**
As a teenager Pierre was a close follower of the folk revival movement and has been a radio DJ in Paris for many years. This issue he pays tribute to the great Algerian singer, Hasna el Becharia on p25

**Tatiana Rucinska**
Since 2002, Stockholm-based Tatiana aka DJ Aïcha, has been compiling the *Songlines Gig Guide*. In this issue, she presents its final iteration (p72) and bids us farewell. You will be missed Tatiana!

*Songlines* was launched in 1999 and is the definitive magazine for world music – music that has its roots in all parts of the globe, from Mali to Mexico, India to Iraq. Whether this music is defined as traditional, contemporary, folk or fusion, *Songlines* is the only magazine to truly represent and embrace it. However, *Songlines* is not just about music, but about how the music fits into the landscape; it's about politics, history and identity. Delivered in both print and digital formats, *Songlines*, through its extensive articles and reviews, is your essential and independent guide to a world of music and culture, whether you are starting on your journey of discovery or are already a seasoned fan.

@SonglinesMag facebook.com/songlines instagram.com/songlinesmag songlines.co.uk

SONGLINES

Editor
**Russ Slater Johnson**
Publisher
**James Anderson-Hanney**
Assistant Editor
**Emma Rycroft**
Art Director
**Juliet Boucher**
Listings Editor
**Tatiana Rucinska**
Assisted this issue by
**Erin Cobby, Izzy Felton & Spencer Grady**
Online Content Editor
**James McCarthy**
Marketing Manager
**John Barnett**
Marketing Assistant
**Oscar Faulkner**
Cover Photo
**Al-fousseni Konate**
Cover Art Direction
**Carolina Vallejo (One World Records)**
Founding Editor
**Simon Broughton**
Contributing Editors
**Jane Cornwell, Mark Ellingham & Nigel Williamson**
Subscriptions Director
**Sally Boettcher**
Editorial Director
**Martin Cullingford**
Managing Director
**Ravi Chandiramani**
Publishing Director
**Tom Curtiss**
CEO **Ben Allen**
Chairman **Mark Allen**

**SUBSCRIPTIONS**
UK: 0800 137 201
Overseas: +44 (0)1722 716997
subscriptions@markallengroup.com

**ADVERTISING**
+44 (0)20 7501 6683
james@songlines.co.uk

MA Education & Music
Part of
Mark Allen
www.markallengroup.com

*Songlines* is published by
MA Education & Music Ltd
St Jude's Church, Dulwich Rd,
London, SE24 0PB, UK
info@songlines.co.uk

© MA Education & Music Ltd, 2024. All rights reserved. No part of *Songlines* may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without prior written permission of the publishing director.
The views expressed do not necessarily represent those of the editor or *Songlines* advertisements in the journal do not imply endorsement of the products or services advertised. Please read our privacy policy, by visiting privacypolicy.markallengroup.com. This will explain how we process, use and safeguard your data.

ISSN 1464-8113.
**Printed by** Pensord Press Ltd, Dowlais, CF48 3TD

**Want to stock *Songlines*?**
**Tel:** 01722 716997
**Email:** customercare@markallengroup.com

recycle
When you have finished with this magazine please recycle it.

# PURBECK VALLEY FOLK FESTIVAL

**15-18 AUGUST 2024**

**WEEKEND TICKETS FROM £125 INCL. CAMPING**

## THE LONGEST JOHNS
## SECKOU KEITA HOMELAND BAND (SEN)
## LE VENT DU NORD (CAN)
## JOHN SMITH KÍLA (IRE)
## DIRK POWELL (USA)
## SAM KELLY TRIO - THE HENRY GIRLS (IRE)
## MICHAEL MCGOLDRICK & TIM EDEY
## 3 DAFT MONKEYS - O'HOOLEY & TIDOW
## MEGSON - N'FAMADY KOUYATE (GIN)
## MARTHA TILSTON - RORY MCLEOD

THE BOOKSHOP BAND - FILKINS ENSEMBLE - JAEJA - MOSCOW DRUG CLUB
ARTHUR COATES & KERRAN COTTERELL - THE TROUBLE NOTES - GOOD HABITS
TASHKEZAR - MARVARA - SUTHERING - HANNAH SANDERS & BEN SAVAGE
AMICA - DUEA - THE GREAT MALARKEY - DANGER GOAT - TWO MAN TING
GABRIEL MORENO AND THE QUIVERING POETS - THREEPENNY BIT - AAYUSHI
14 WOLVES - GOOD TROUBLE - QUINNS QUINNEY - ANNA RENAE - DEN MILLER
ARQUEBUS TRIO - THE ASHEN KEYS - DIRTY BIG CANAL DANCE BAND
DEVON YOUTH FOLK ENSEMBLE - IGLOO HEARTS - LAURA LOH - PISKEY LED
MEGAN LINFORD - MUSTARD ALLEGRO - RACHEL HILL - **PLUS LOADS MORE!**

## MORE THAN JUST GREAT MUSIC...

### CRAFT AREA

CROCHET - POTTERY
TIE-DYE - STONE CARVING
WILLOW WORKSHOPS
BLACKSMITH - ORIGAMI
PRINTING - CYANOTYPE
TRADITIONAL WOOD TURNING
PEBBLE PAINTING

### KIDS' ACTIVITIES

ALL KIDS' ACTIVITIES INCLUDED IN TICKET PRICE!

STORYTELLING - DINOSAURS - FANCY DRESS - RHYME TIME
TOY SWAPSHOP - THEATRE & GAMES WORKSHOPS - CRAFTS
BOUNCY CASTLES - ARCHERY - WELLY WANGING - HOOLA-HOOPING
TREASURE HUNT - SPACE HOPPER OBSTACLE COURSE - CLIMBING WALL

CIRCUS AREA: JUGGLING - UNICYCYLING - DIABLOS - DEVILSTICKS
STILT WALKING - ACROBATICS WITH INFLATABLE TUMBLE MAT

## 5 STAGES - 2 CEILIDHS - OPEN MIC - SESSIONS
## COMEDY - WORKSHOPS - HEALING AREA - FIRE SHOWS

BEAUTIFUL LITTLE FESTIVAL ON A FARM WITH VIEWS ACROSS THE PURBECK HILLS AND CORFE CASTLE - EVERYONE'S FAVOURITE FESTIVAL

**WWW.PURBECKVALLEYFOLKFESTIVAL.CO.UK**

**30 The Zawose Queens**

Michael Mbwambo

**20 Hermanos Gutiérrez**

Jim Herrington

**68 Abdullah Ibrahim**

Courtesy of Gearbox Records

## UPFRONT


**06** Top of the World

**08** The Source
**Tremor, Latinas of London, Raghu Dixit, CimaFest, New Regency Orchestra**

**13** Introducing
**Birdvox**

**18** Take Note
**Ars Nova Napoli**

**20** Spotlight
**Hermanos Gutiérrez**

**22** Simon Says

**23** Letters

**25** Obituaries


## FEATURES


*Africa Special*

**26** Salif Keita

**30** The Zawose Queens

**32** The Joy

**34** Def Mama Def

**35** Lady Donli

**36** Franck Biyong

**38** Banjo Summit

**42** Courir de Mardi Gras


## REVIEWS


**44** Africa

**48** Americas

**54** Europe

**60** Middle East

**61** Asia & Pacific

**64** Fusion


## REGULARS


**66** My World
**Jamz Supernova**

**68** Beginner's Guide
**Abdullah Ibrahim**

**71** Dispatch from
**Fes, Morocco**

**72** Gig Guide

**76** Festival Guide

**79** Fireside Stories
**Asha Puthli**

**89** **Eliza Carthy**'s News of the Whirl

**90** Essential 10
**Big Band Revival Albums**

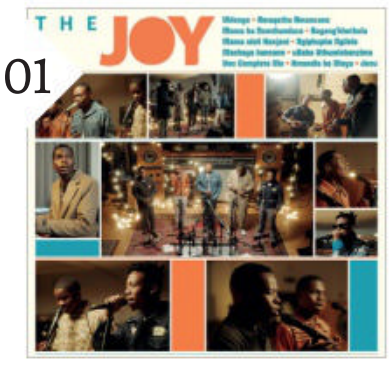

**"I wanted to combine Indian classical music with American jazz and form a third-stream music… Luckily the planets were aligned with my thoughts"**

*Read about how pioneering fusioneer Asha Puthli went from studying home economics to providing ground-shaking vocals for Ornette Coleman on p79*

# TOP OF THE WORLD

On this issue's compilation – our curated selection of new music and bonus tracks from across the globe

## TOP OF THE WORLD TRACKS




01 **The Joy**
'Amaqatha Amancane'
From *The Joy* on Transgressive Records

The smooth, rich harmonies of the South African quartet in this grin-inducing, joyful tune echo its playful story, thought up while teasing a friend at a barbecue for cutting the meat too small. **See p44**

02 **Swamp Dogg**
'Ugly Man's Wife'
From *Blackgrass: From West Virginia to 125th St* on Oh Boy Records

Though he's not recorded bluegrass before, it's clear Swamp Dogg has always been listening. With the genre's classic swing and his laidback vocals, he shares his laconic advice on how to live '*the high life*.' **See p51**

03 **Kiran Ahluwalia**
'Jaane Jahan'
From *Comfort Food* on Kiran Ahluwalia

With dancing, intricate vocals and a funky, bass-heavy melody, Ahluwalia urges listeners to recognise the humanity in one another; in response to the rising tide of Hindu fundamentalism in India. **See p61**

04 **North East Ska Jazz Orchestra**
'Piazza Della Libertà'
From *Sulla Rotta dei Venti* on Brixton Records

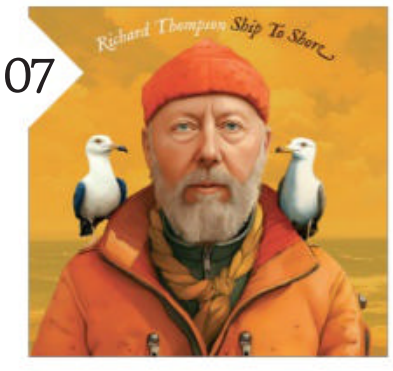
Hand percussion and an amplified voice kick off this twisting, squealing Balkan delight, replete with oom-pah, flaring horns and mischievous energy. **See p55**

05 **The Zawose Queens**
'Chidodo (feat Wamwiduka Band)'
From *Maisha* on Real World Records

Ukulele, strident vocals, ululation and percussion come together on a bright track about recognising gains and achievements, no matter how small. **See p47**

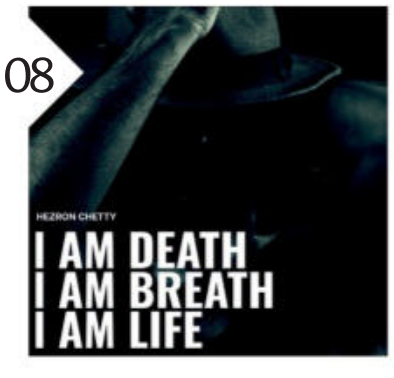
06 **Ballaké Sissoko & Derek Gripper**
'Ninkoy'
From *Ballaké Sissoko & Derek Gripper* on Matsuli Music / Platoon

Rippling, improvised notes of conversation between Sissoko's *kora* and Gripper's guitar bubble into smooth, synchronised, subtle magic. **See p45**



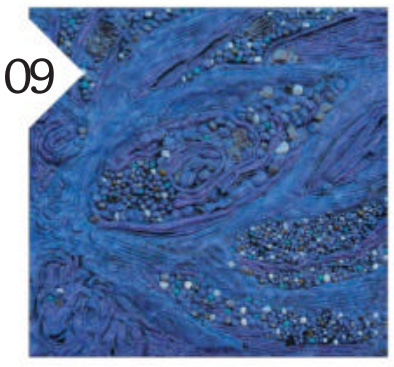

07 **Richard Thompson**
'The Fear Never Leaves You'
From *Ship to Shore* on New West Records

With deep, Nick Cave-esque vocals and thunderous percussion, Thompson reflects poignantly and empathetically on a war-weary soldier's PTSD. **See p58**




08 **Hezron Chetty**
'Composure'
From *I am Death, I am Breath, I am Life* on Mad Violinist Productions

Chetty alternately plucks and bows his violin in this poignant, rhythmic consideration of calm – part of a masterful work exploring experiences of divorce, death and homelessness. **See p65**



09 **Ajate**
'Nagi Yoni'
From *Dala Toni* on 180g

These '*Afrobayashi*' pioneers mark their return in full form: rolling rhythms, acoustic percussion, groove-driven guitar melodies and light, clear vocals sway, swing and fill the soul. **See p64**

10 **Ibelisse Guardia Ferragutti & Frank Rosaly**
'TURBULÊNCIA'
From *MESTIZX* on International Anthem / Nonesuch

This husband-and-wife team showcase their mastery of Bolivian and Puerto Rican percussion. Hypnotic. **See p49**

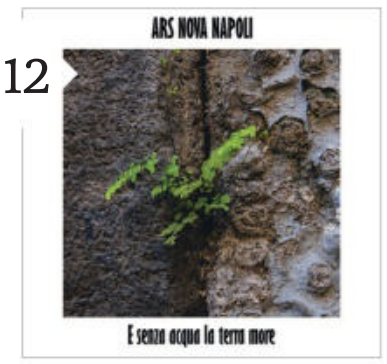
## SUBSCRIBE FOR YOUR FREE CD

*Receive the Top of the World CD every issue with a print subscription:*
**https://www.songlines.co.uk/subscribe**

## + BONUS TRACKS

11 **Hermanos Gutiérrez**
'Abuelita'
From *Sonido Cósmico* on Easy Eye Sound

Inspired by their Latin American roots and dedicated to their grandmother and mother; the Gutiérrez brothers weave jazz, blues and rolling rhythms into their mesmeric, calming guitar work. **See p20**




12 **Ars Nova Napoli**
'Canzone della Vela'
From *E Senza Acqua la Terra More* on Apogeo Records

A poignant melody from the Neapolitan group that have been going for 15 years, powerfully played out with soaring vocals, billowing accordion chords, strident pipes and swaying percussion. **See p18**

13 **Franck Biyong**
'Oladipo (feat Chief Udoh Essiet, Tony Allen)'
From *Radio Masoda* on Tangential Music

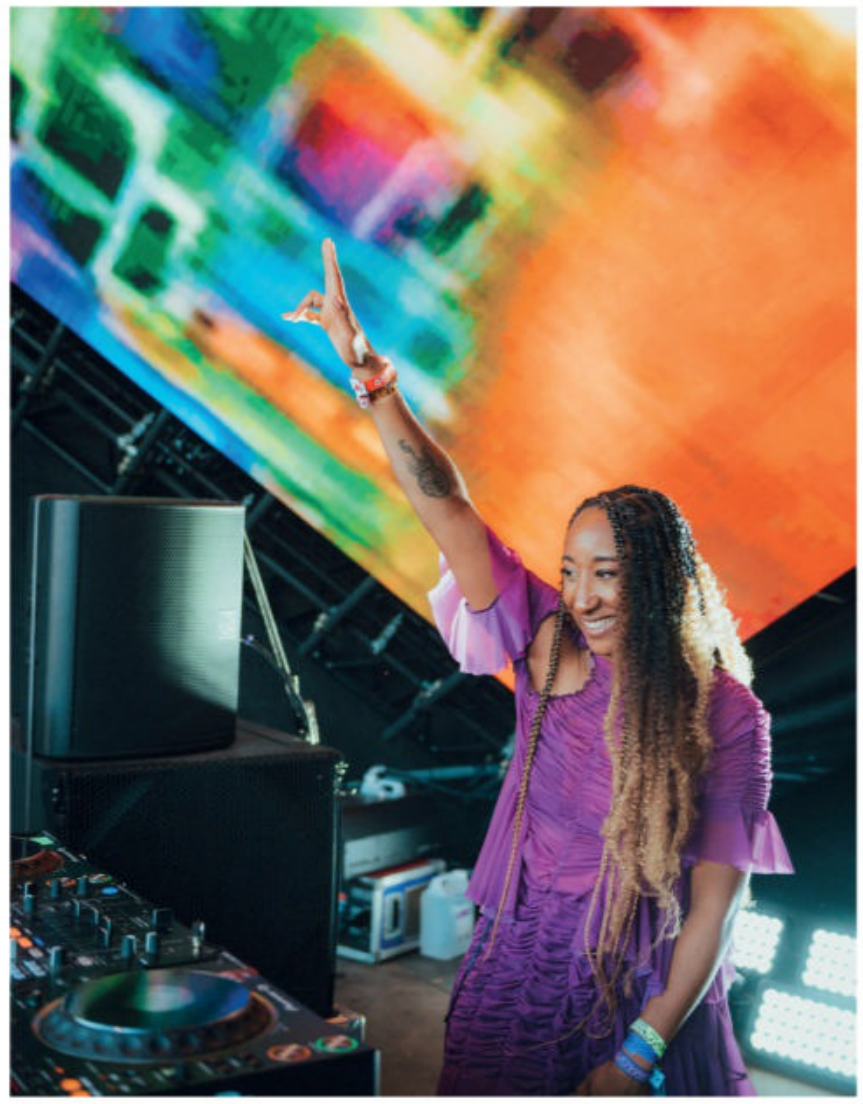
Working around a recording of Tony Allen, Biyong and Chief Udoh proffer an Afrobeat gem that would surely have had the late, great drummer grinning. **See p36**

14 **Def Mama Def**
'Limu Laaj'
From *Oh Maliko* on Defmaa Maadef

Fiery dance energy defines this duo – with bouncing beats, synthesised vocals, hefty urban percussion and playful spoken word exclamations. Utterly infectious. **See p34**

15 **Lady Donli**
'Comme Ci Comma Ça (with The Lagos Panic)'
From *Pan African Rockstar* on Bad Moon Ltd / Believe

Propulsive big band brass and Chic-like syncopations underpin this Nigerian songstress' reflections on everyday ups and downs. **See p35**



Giulia Spadafora @giugliotto

**"I thought being on the internet discovering something then playing it on the radio was enough [but] to really understand a place, you need to go there, you need to invest in the community."**

*Discover on p66 how Jamz Supernova went from mixtape CDs, pirate radio and Friday nights listening to R&B to becoming one of the most exciting global music DJs on British radio*

## TOP OF THE WORLD DOWNLOAD

To download our *Top of the World* compilation please visit
https://linktr.ee/SL199
or use the QR code to the left

# MORGENLAND @ 20

Bonus CD featuring ten once-in-a-lifetime live recordings from **Morgenland Festival**

Over 20 years the Morgenland Festival has brought to Germany – and specifically to the charming town of Osnabrück – some of the greatest artists from the Middle East, North Africa, Central Asia and beyond. The festival has also initiated inspiring collaborations that simply wouldn't have happened without Morgenland.

On this issue's covermount CD, artistic director ***Michael Dreyer*** picks live recordings of some of his personal festival highlights.

**1 Alim Qasimov & Michel Godard**
**'A Trace of Grace' (2016)**
Azeri *mugham* singer Alim Qasimov met French serpent player Michel Godard for the first time at Morgenland. I remember Alim hesitating when I suggested the idea of this encounter (Michel had told me it was his dream to work with Alim). All hesitation was gone after the first moments with Michel's stunning ability to play in the most complex modes. It was a magical moment to see how Alim and Michel clicked.

**2 Rabih Lahoud, Moslem Rahal, Florian Weber, Anna-Lena Schnabel 'Sawa' (2017)**
Lebanese music was the focus in 2017 and I invited the singer Rabih Lahoud. Rabih knew pianist Florian Weber from a project of Markus Stockhausen. I asked Moslem Rahal, a genius *ney* player from Latakia and Anna-Lena Schnabel, a German sax player, to join. The quartet played the opening of the festival and 'Sawa' (Together) has this beautiful energy of a first encounter.

**3 Hewar & Jivan Gasparyan 'Needless to Say' (2011)**
Hewar is a Syrian trio of Dima Orsho (vocals), Kinan Azmeh (clarinet) and Issam Rafea (*oud*), and as the civil war in Syria had started they played the opening of the festival in tears. Jivan was also attending and I remember we were nervous when we asked if he would join for a piece. Fair to say, the result was extraordinary.

**4 Jivan Gasparyan 'Mama' (2017)**
Jivan Gasparyan dedicated this song to his mother and when he sang it he was nearly 90 years old. I loved to work with Jivan, what a gentle human being. We recorded his last album at Geghard monastery in the mountains close to Yerevan with the bats flying over our heads.

**5 Perhat Khaliq 'Shukri Didim' (2010)**
I met Perhat in a club in Ürümqi, the capital of the Autonomous Uyghur region in Northwestern China. I was impressed by his musicianship and voice. The moment I asked if the band had its own repertoire, Perhat started to sing a version of the Uyghur Dolan *muqam*. I was blown away. To bring Perhat to Germany was a miracle. He later became the first Uyghur superstar in China.

**6 Kayhan Kalhor & Toumani Diabaté 'Improvisation, First Encounter' (2016)**
I had asked Kayhan Kalhor if there was someone he had always wanted to work with. His answer was Toumani. *Kamancheh* and *kora*, bowed and plucked string instruments, and two of the masters from Iran and Mali. When they started playing there was no doubt that this was the birth of a unique duo. This recording was made by Walter Quintus, a genius recording engineer who died far too early. We miss him every day.

**7 Wu Wei & Wu Man 'Distant Mountains' (2018)**
Another first encounter: Chinese *pipa* star Wu Man and amazing *sheng* (mouth organ) virtuoso Wu Wei. Wu Wei's collaborations with symphony orchestras, jazz and baroque music ensembles are impressive. The same with Wu Man. She is *the* pipa virtuoso.

**8 Khazar 'Khazar' (2018)**
Morgenland 2018 focussed on Central Asia. I stayed for a few days in beautiful Almaty. The drummer Bodek Janke introduced me to Jalgasbek Ilis, a young multi-instrumentalist, who had just started a new ensemble, Khazar. I fell in love with the beauty of this music.

**9 Morgenland All Star Band feat Ibrahim Keivo 'Al Laila Nugani' (2017)**
The Morgenland All Star Band is one of the ensembles born at the festival, a beautiful mixture of musicians and music from Kurdish wedding songs to Uyghur funk and jazz. In 2017 Morgenland brought several concerts to Beirut and the Beqaa Valley. This piece features Ibrahim Keivo (vocals), Moslem Rahal (*ney*) and Rony Barrak (*darbouka*) in his hometown of Beirut.

**10 Golnar & Mahan Trio with Yazz Ahmed & Naïssam Jalal 'This is Not My Voice' (2023)**
The most recent recording; Golnar & Mahan Trio invited flautist Naïssam Jalal and trumpeter Yazz Amed to join their performance. '*This is not my voice / Tell my mother...*' brought me to tears. What a statement, what power! This became the hymn of last year's festival.

MORGENLAND FESTIVAL OSNABRUECK

***www.morgenland-festival.com***

Andy Spray

GIG CARTEL IN ASSOCIATION WITH FRUIT PIE MUSIC PRESENT

# NIK KERSHAW AND BAND

WITH SUPPORT FROM SEB WESSON

2024

28 JUN - OXFORD - O2 ACADEMY
29 JUN - NORWICH - EPIC STUDIOS
12 JUL - NORTHAMPTON - ROADMENDER

# Peter Hook & The Light

THURSDAY 17TH OCTOBER 2024
PARR HALL WARRINGTON

FRIDAY 1ST NOVEMBER 2024
ST GEORGE'S HALL BRADFORD

THURSDAY 7TH NOVEMBER 2024
CHEESE & GRAIN FROME

FRIDAY 8TH NOVEMBER 2024
TRAMSHED CARDIFF

PERFORMING BOTH 'SUBSTANCE' ALBUMS BY JOY DIVISION & NEW ORDER LIVE

UNITED KINGDOM & IRELAND TOUR 2024

PETERHOOKANDTHELIGHT.LIVE

THE GIG CARTEL IN ASSOCIATION WITH SPIDER TOURING

# ELLES BAILEY

*Beneath the Neon Glow Tour*

25 SEP LINCOLN THE DRILL
26 SEP NORWICH THE WATERFRONT
17 NOV CHESTER THE LIVE ROOMS
1 DEC LEEDS BRUDENELL

# THE UNDERTONES

OCTOBER 2024 and friends

Thursday 10 Liverpool Hangar 34*
Friday 11 Sunderland Fire Station*
Saturday 12 Sheffield Leadmill*
* RUTS DC

Thursday 17 Lincoln Engine Shed+
Friday 18 Norwich Epic+
Saturday 19 Wolverhampton Kk's+
+ THE REZILLOS

Thursday 24 Frome Cheese & Grain #
Friday 25 London Camden Electric Ballroom #
Saturday 26 Southampton 1865# # PETE WYLIE & THE MIGHTY WAH!

# WISHBONE ASH

TWIN GUITARS - CLASSIC ROCK

*FEATURING SONGS FROM LIVE DATES II*

21:09 CHESTER LIVE ROOMS
23:09 LYTHAM LOWTHER PAVILION
24:09 SOUTHPORT ATKINSON
26:09 CARLISLE OLD FIRE STATION
27:09 GLASGOW ORAN MOR
03:10 LEEDS BRUDENELL
04:10 HOLMFIRTH PICTUREDROME
05:10 BURY MET THEATRE
07:10 BURY ST EDMUNDS THE APEX
09:10 LINCOLN DRILL
10:10 WALSALL ARENA
11:10 RUGBY BENN HALL
21:10 CARDIFF TRAMSHED
22:10 GLOUCESTER GUILDHALL
23:10 NEWBURY ARLINGTON ARTS
24:10 ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL

ASHCON 2024 WISHBONE ASH CONVENTION
CHESTER LIVE ROOMS - SATURDAY 21 SEP (MIDDAY)
TICKETS PURCHASED FOR ASHCON INCLUDE ENTRY TO EVENING SHOW

# Toyah & Robert

27 JUL ULVERSTON
THE CORO

30 AUG WARRINGTON
PARR HALL

17 DEC SUNDERLAND
THE FIRE STATION

22 DEC WOLVERHAMPTON
THE WULFRUN

*"CLASSIC ROCK IN THE COMPANY OF TWO ROCK LEGENDS AND THEIR BAND !"*

# Feel the Tremor

***Erin Cobby** heads to a festival in the Azores for a weekend of global sounds and finds herself part of a community championing inclusivity, creativity and open-air commmunions*

"It's almost becoming a clichê for us, this idea of having the island as the constant headliner," says Tremor's artistic director, Márcio Laranjeira. "But, it's also something we can't run away from."

And given the natural beauty of Portugal's São Miguel, the island in the Azores which hosts Tremor, a five-day festival, it's a takeaway that's easy to understand. And it's not just the stunning natural beauty which impresses, but the swathe of city centre venues which make Tremor a memorable experience. From Jesuit churches made of volcanic rock to grand generations-old theatres and retro-fitted clubs, it's a cut above the muddy bog associated with British festivals.

And that's even before you take in the bespoke musical experiences that the diverse landscape provides. Taking the form of post-punk shows in abandoned quarries and electronic exhibits on cliff outcrops, the geography has truly been sewn into the programming. However, if you do manage to tear your eyes away from the stunning surroundings, you might take note of another element which makes Tremor so much more than a destination festival: the community.

This year's event took place March 19-23, and beyond diverse headliners including Faizal Mostrixx, Romperayo and Rastafogo, musical offerings also came in the form of collaborations with local groups days before the festival, offering opportunities for cross-cultural collaboration and symbiotic learning.

I first experienced what these workshops can yield on opening night. All Hands On Deck are an all-female and non-binary DJ collective from Manchester. Building on their 'open-deck' ethos they came to the Azores and ran workshops with local aspiring DJs. This culminated in all attendees sharing the stage for the opening party into the early hours, spinning remixes of tracks such as Unknown T's 'Goodums' to raucous applause, both from the women and non-binary DJs on stage and the wider audience. One of them, Filipa Fonesca, reflects on the experience. "Apart from a full set of beginner skills and the resources to develop them, the workshop provided a supportive community, both local and international."

This is the true purpose of these residencies: to showcase the local talent on the island to the wider world. One collective which knows this more than most is Ondamarela. They were approached by Tremor's founders after it came to light in 2018 that the deaf community on the island had never attended a musical performance. They contacted ASISM, the island's deaf association, and after a series of workshops created the joint collective Som Sim Zero. The name sounds like 'sincere sound' in Portuguese, and according to the group's artistic director Ricardo Baptista, it "looks beautiful in sign language."

Since that initial year, Som Sim Zero have deepened their roots on the island, collaborating with local Azorean musicians as well as kids from the local music school, turning this initial opportunity into a year-round community. They even exist outside of Tremor, playing Rock in Rio Lisbon in 2022. This year they collaborated with Azorean percussion group Bora Lá Tocar to create a street procession. "The idea was to create a demonstration which addressed the ideas we had discussed at the workshop stage," explains

Inês Subtil; Marina Cruz

Ana Bragança, Ondamarela's other artistic director. "We wanted to create encounters and value invisible things, to riot, in a way."

The culmination was electric. With a procession finishing in the stunning Jardim Botânico António Borges, audience members were treated to an interactive performance which included signing and meditative breath work. This transitioned into a full percussive party, everyone dancing and waving banners under the branches of an ancient tree. "We weren't able to rehearse it before," says Ricardo, "so that amazing explosion of energy, with the audience really going for it, took on a life of its own."

This idea of uncovering local talent isn't limited to the residences, however, but is embedded in the festival's core. The Azores has a strong culture of *bandas filarmónicas*, groups of musicians who are all taught classical instruments from a young age. Tremor decided to push this a step further and, to encourage creativity, made composing original songs a stipulation of performing when they launched the festival.

Traditional music is also very much on offer and something I experienced after embarking on a 9am, soundtracked hike through rolling green hills. We eventually reached a breathtaking lagoon where Patrícia Relvas treated us to emotional *fado* melodies, her voice rippling across the water. In the distance, Roberto Afonso started playing the *viola da terra*, the strings echoing hauntingly around the clearing.

When finally stood side-by-side the duo embarked on a series of folk songs, culminating with 'Presença das Formigas' by José Afonso, a protest song popular before Portugal's Carnation Revolution. "We did this because of the latest election result in Portugal and the whole world's false populist prophets," Relvas and Afonso, who perform together as Lavoisier, explain. The set ended with everyone singing 'Liberdade' before disappearing back into the mist. Reflecting, the pair state: "Popular culture used to be celebrated in the open air, with our ancestors' songs shared with all of us. It was an incredible sensation to return to that beginning."

What started as a one-day event for 800 people has now grown into a five-day programme which caters to over 1,500. Each one of these attendees gets more than they bargained for with Tremor. I saw Japanese folk metal and danced hand in hand in a massive circle to Northeastern Brazilian street music, but, most amazingly, far beyond the magical landscape, I felt part of the fabric of what makes up a truly unique island community.

Left: Som Sim Zero at the Jardim Botânico António Borges; Above right: All Hands on Deck; Right: Rastafogo

Conrad Coetzee

# THE **GLOBE** AT A **GLANCE**

**BRAZIL:** At the end of February, Brazil's Institute of National Historical and Artistic Heritage officially recognised the instrumental genre, *choro*, as Brazilian cultural heritage… **COLOMBIA:** Afro Legends, El Gioh, Caro Mosquera and TimbiÁfrica collaboratively released 'Pum! Cayó' on April 28 to mark three years since a National Strike in 2021 when National Police '*shot and killed at least three people and committed sexual and gender violence against 28,*' [Amnesty International], and '*left over 100 with eye injuries*' [Temblores]… **HUNGARY:** Folk_ME (shorthand for Folk Music Education) is a new online platform for learning about folk music with a searchable database of songs featuring video performances, lyrics and tutorials. It's currently full of Hungarian songs, with the aim of covering neighbouring and wider regions. Find the site at folk-me.com/en…

Madala Kunene

**SOUTH AFRICA:** Madala Kunene has received the Gold Order of Ikhamanga, '*For his exceptional contribution to the arts, especially jazz music*', from President MC Ramaphosa. Also receiving an award from Ramaphosa, albeit posthumously, was Madosini Latozi Mphahleni (1943-2022), who received a Silver Order of Ikhamanga… **SOUTH KOREA:** Vivaldi's 'Four Seasons' has been re-composed by AI using 2050 climate data and dubbed 'The [uncertain] Four Seasons' to raise awareness of the potential effects of climate change… **UK:** FolkEast is in search of a new home for 2025 after the site where the festival takes place has been put up for sale by its owners… **US:** *Kosher Jammers: Jewish Connections in Jazz – Volume 1: The USA* by Mike Gerber, a book chronicling the role of Jewish musicians in US jazz, is now available in paperback. A second volume covering the rest of the world is in the works.

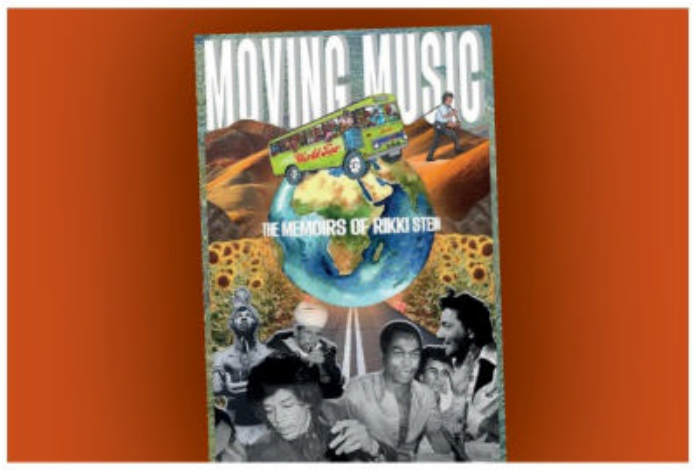
Marie Planeille

## Late Night Blues

Tinariwen will perform at the Late Night Proms (part of BBC Proms 2024) on August 28. The desert blues icons have just released their new emotive, dreamlike single, 'Azawad', dedicated to the Touaregs of Northern Mali, and are partway through a world tour. Including Australasia and North America, the tour will also take in Wales (Green Man Festival) and Manchester in the UK.

## Just Add Water

MISHRA, a collective who fuse Indian classical music with UK folk, have created the music for a new interpretation of *The Secret Garden* (15 June – 20 July) taking place at Regent's Park Open Air Theatre, London. '*The music will be inspired by the Yorkshire landscape, Indian classical music, magic, and weeding… all of our favourite things basically*,' say the group.




## Stein-Powered Tales

Wordville have published *Moving Music - The Memoirs of Rikki Stein*, an autobiography from renowned music manager Rikki Stein, who was the manager of Fela Kuti and also worked with artists including Jimi Hendrix, The Animals and The Kinks. As well tales from these encounters, the book recounts his time living with the Master Musicians of Joujouka in Morocco.

Lucas Nogueira

## Join the Club

Legendary Brazilian singer Milton Nascimento and jazz tour-de-force Esperanza Spalding are releasing an album, *Milton + esperanza*, on August 9 via Concord Records. The album was recorded in Brazil in 2023 and includes takes on Milton classics, new Spalding songs and covers of Michael Jackson and The Beatles. Paul Simon, Shabaka Hutchings and others make cameos.

## IT'S HAPPENING

West African drummers and *djembé* makers, **WOODEN ROOTS** (2-4 August) are hosting a weekend event in the Suffolk countryside… **KING'S CROSS SUMMER SOUNDS** (August 15–26) is a free 12-day festival featuring performances from Unicorn Frequency and Kinnaris Quintet… This summer, a town in West Cork will become a nucleus for Irish folk music thanks to **MASTERS OF TRADITION** (August 21-25)… Somali icon and activist **SAHRA HALGAN** (1-14 September) has lined up a UK tour this autumn… William Tyler and Reyna Tropical join other incredible musicians as part of **BETWEEN THE LINES** (8, 12 & 14 September), an event series across London… 12-piece Romani Balkan brass band **FANFARE CIOCĂRLIA** (October 9-13) are playing five dates across the UK…**LLAIS** (9-13 October), a festival paying homage to the voice, is coming to Cardiff with residencies, installations and performances from Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares, Iarla Ó Lionáird, Ganavya and others… **KATHERINE PRIDDY** (February 26 – March 21, 2025) has a busy 2024 with festivals and gigs throughout the summer, and has now announced headline shows for early 2025… Scotland's famed traditional music celebration, **HOOLIE IN THE HYDRO** (April 5, 2025) will take over Carnegie Hall in a rare trip across the pond.

## IN HARMONY

*Currently on the Songlines stereo…*

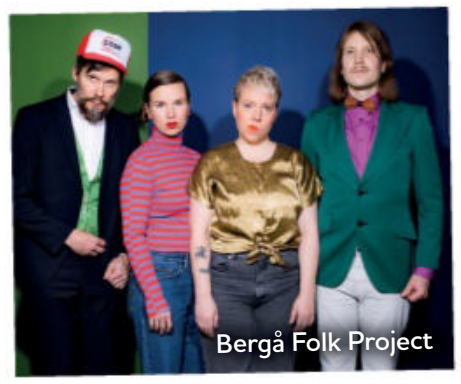
**Lo'Jo 'Viens (feat Jupiter & Okwess)'**
The pioneering French troupe are back with a new album in September and the first taster is this devillish slow-burner with distorted bass and lyrics in French and Lingala.

**Bergå Folk Project – *Encore* EP**
Finnish folk quartet follow up excellent self-titled 2022 debut with four fine new tracks, from euphoric highs through Sámi rap-embellished paeans and bucolic nature-minded motifs.

**Criolo, Dino D'Santiago & Amaro Freitas 'Esperança'**
A dynamite collaboration between these three lusophone artists which is part hip-hop, part jazz, but most of all, full of rhythm and passion. Intoxicating stuff.

**Ingunn Bjørgo (feat Åsmund Reistad & Sindre Tronrud) – *Cadansa Mazurka***
The award-winning accordion player winds her way with ease through two tunes: 'Mazurka' is charming, hesitant, prone to abrupt stops; 'Askerladd' is a quicker, light-footed and mystical affair. A tantalising teaser for Bjørgo's 2025 album.

**Michalis & Pantelis Kalogerakis 'Tis Agapis (feat Nefeli Fasouli)'**
First track from the Cretan twin brothers' new album which puts poetry to song. This one features the words of lauded modern Greek poet Michális Ganás with vibrant *bouzouki* and mandolin, and a delightful meandering clarinet.




Marjo Tynkkynen

L-R: Inge Thomson, Charlotte Printer, Jenny Sturgeon and Sarah Hayes

# Birdvox

Flight, fun and food for thought. ***Jo Frost*** talks with the nature-loving, socially conscious Scottish supergroup about clubland and cicadas

The current trend in avian-inspired musical projects shows no sign of abating. Joining the distinguished ranks of artists professing an appreciation of birds are four highly acclaimed musicians – Inge Thomson, Jenny Sturgeon, Sarah Hayes and Charlotte Printer – who call themselves Birdvox. Besides their mutual passion for all things feathered, these four women bonded over their love of harmony singing and kitchen discos.

Birdvox is an evolution of *Northern Flyway*, the multimedia project Thomson and Sturgeon began in 2017, featuring Hayes on vocals, beatboxer Jason Singh and sound recordist Magnus Robb. "We loved doing *Northern Flyway*," says Sturgeon, who has a PhD in seabird ecology, "but it was quite logistically and economically difficult to tour because there were seven of us (four musicians, plus three crew)." They came up with the idea of Birdvox on their last tour in 2021 and decided that they wouldn't just focus on birds, but anything they felt really passionate about.

The project is still very much in its infancy – when we speak (in mid-April), they have yet to perform a gig. One track they share with me is 'Cicadas', a song Thomson wrote during a residency in Vietnam where she became fascinated with this tiny insect that creates a mighty sound. It's a joyfully up-tempo number with disco beats and Thomson's distinctive vocals and accordion underpinned by an array of synths – in keeping with the electro, upbeat sound the foursome are experimenting with, although acoustic instruments (accordion, flute, guitar) are still very much part of their sound.

While cicadas aren't the normal indigenous species the four generally write about, Thomson confirms that birds feature in around a quarter of the tracks, either as inspiration for song titles or as sound recordings, including a dawn chorus Sturgeon recorded in Glenshee.

Besides birds, the songs are, says Hayes, "about wider aspects of the natural world and exploring a variety of subjects, including misogyny in the music industry, mental health, neurodivergence and more." 'We Are', written by Sturgeon is "about us trying to do our best and feeling like we're coming up against everything, whether that's as women in work or whether that's reading the news and feeling helpless about what we can do to make a change." Sturgeon wants to instil that sense of camaraderie you get when you're dancing at a festival or in a club with a load of people you don't know. "It's a very uplifting song and it's got that feeling of 'everything is possible,'" adds Thomson. Ultimately, Birdvox are intent on making joyous music, while at the same time providing food for thought and space for contemplation. "I don't think we could put a finger on our actual stage aesthetic yet, but it will be fun and flamboyant!" Thomson smiles.

The four will go into a studio in September to record an album but prior to that Birdvox will be performing one of their first shows (including a Silent Disco) at Cambridge Folk Festival this July as part of the festival's new partnership with Showcase Scotland Expo. As Lisa Schwartz, Cambridge's programming manager, says "It's just really fun and upbeat... with this band, the whole is more than the sum of its parts, and that's saying something!" ◆

**+ Birdvox** *are playing The Glad Cafe, Glasgow on Jul 23 and Cambridge Folk Festival (July 25-28)*

L-R: Desta French, Sophie Castillo, JSCA and Milena Sanchez, London's Jazz Cafe, April 20, 2024

# Latina Power

***Erin Cobby** watches four of London's finest Latina singers come together for a show that's all about celebration, solidarity and creating a Latin-London scene free of ego*

"You just saw four Latinas from London['s] dreams come true," Desta French shouts to the sold-out crowd at The Jazz Cafe's *Latinas of London* event. Joined by Sophie Castillo, JSCA and Milena Sanchez, they had just finished singing a medley of Selena classics including 'Como la Flor' and 'Amor Prohibido', to which the audience went wild, singing along and cheering in turn.

During each number, each impeccably outfitted woman took a turn with the mic to solo part of the song, with the others shoring her up, at one point literally, as French knelt on the floor and pointed up at Castillo while she was singing.

This moment encompassed the whole point of the event: Latinas supporting Latinas, a theme evident throughout as each woman's set blended seamlessly into the next, placing no one above the other on the billing and giving the night the feel of an endless celebration.

And these kinds of events are sorely needed. While women are making waves in Latin genres in general, according to French there's still work that needs to be done when it comes to comparing Latin female artists against each other. She feels this is particularly true in London, as there are so few females pushing the London-Latino sound, which has been finding its feet in recent years, that the general feeling is there's only room for one woman at the top.

French, a London-based singer with Colombian-Italian parents, was the first UK Latin artist to be supported on BBC Radio with an all-Spanish language song in 2020. A front-runner in the Latin-London scene for a while now, she was perfectly placed to curate a night which combatted this feeling of competition. Not only were all the performers female, but the entire team was. French's aim was to cut out the middleman ("who is always literally a man," she says) to ensure that these women were represented in the most authentic way possible.

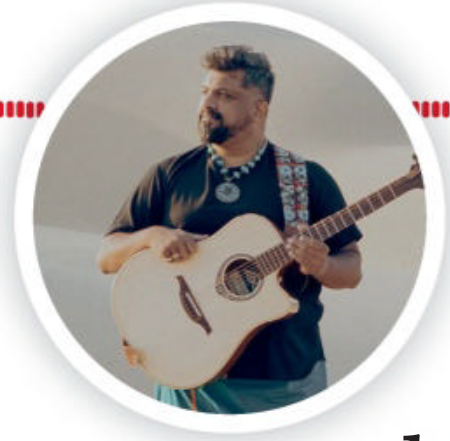
And it was a success. "I'm not going to lie, I'm down for all-female events forever," says JSCA. "The vibe is just immaculate. There was no ego involved, it really felt like a sisterhood."

This celebration was also an incredible showcase, not just of women in the Latin genre in London, but of the breadth of what that 'Latin' genre is. Each woman brought a new feel, from French whose fast-paced vocals belied her London roots, to JSCA's softer numbers inspired by Latin folk music.

According to JSCA, it is this diversification which is also making the women in London's Latin scene stand out. "Not to shade on the guys, but I'm tired of seeing ski-masked hype men in cars with hot girls around them." She explains that, due to the thin line between empowerment and over-sexualisation that Latinas are forced to walk, they're thinking a lot more actively about how they're being perceived. "This is true sonically also," she explains. "We're all taking inspiration from different aspects of Latin music and turning it into something new. As a community, we're digging a little deeper into what Latin music means and that's making people create much better art."

And with these types of events occurring at iconic spaces like The Jazz Cafe, there's hope that this exploration and platforming will continue. As French says: "I know there were people in the crowd that felt inspired and moved by the moment that was taking place, and that's all I can ask for, it's what makes all the work worth it."

@dosconejo, La Linea Festival and La Chonga.

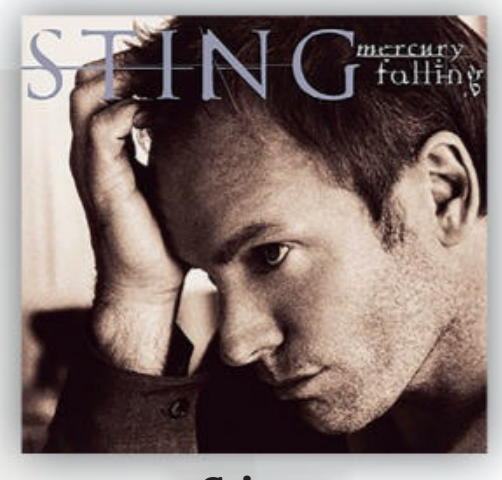


# The 4 Corners and Centre of Raghu Dixit's Universe

*The Indian folk-rocker is back and in ebullient form picking out a truly global selection of albums that have left a deep imprint on his psyche*

## Baaba Maal
*The Traveller*
(Palm Recordings, 2016)

I think this is Baaba Maal's best album and it's one of my favourite world music albums, where so many cultures come together, and where Baaba shows off his fun side. Right from the first track it's great with 'Fulani Rock', but my favourite song is definitely 'Lampenda'. Whenever I hear it, I feel I should write a song like that, a simple two-part song. And then there's lots of vocal jamming on top of it, and such a beautiful, recurring chorus that sticks in your head from the first time you listen to it. Simple music always attracts me a lot, so that's what I try to do as a result. This whole album is a beautiful travel album actually.




## Sting
*Mercury Falling*
(A&M, 1996)

As a young man growing up in Bangalore, I started earning my own money as a scientist and I would go to buy CDs and a lot of the time I would be disappointed that I would like only one or two songs, and the rest of the songs would be ordinary. Then, on a friend's recommendation, I bought *Mercury Falling* and I realised how beautiful it is when you listen to an album completely from top to bottom. It became [a] kind of inspiration that I should always make albums in which all the eight, nine, ten songs or whatever I put in each album, every song should fight for its place. With *Mercury Falling* I realised what a brilliant songwriter Sting is; his poetry really took me by absolute awe. There's a beautiful song, 'I'm So Happy I Can't Stop Crying', about his divorce. He speaks about child custody, how he's managing to divide time with his child. It's a bittersweet song of what a separated parent can feel. It's so honest, so straightforward and so beautiful.

## Ravi Shankar
*Inside the Kremlin*
(Private Music/BMG, 1989)

This was an album that I got introduced to as a child. My dance teacher had got one of the songs from the album for all of us to learn to dance to. It's called the 'Shanti-Mantra', and it is meditative, we call it a *shloka*, it's like a mantra, which you chant. It wishes the best for the whole universe, and each of the elements that makes up the universe. It's a Sanskrit mantra, which is from the *Vedas* [ancient Indian texts], and on top of it is a beautiful humming melody that a choir sings, and then the Moscow [Chamber] Orchestra is backing up the whole track. I remember making a copy of the album using another tape recorder that I used to make mixtapes. It's one of my favourite albums because of 'Shanti-Mantra'.

## Canzoniere Grecanico Salentino
*Canzoniere*
(Ponderosa Music, 2017)

I made friends with Mauro, one of the lead members of the band, thanks to Justin Adams, the guitarist. He and Mauro Durante were touring together and I got to know Mauro. It's an album that brings together so many sounds, it sounds very Irish, it sounds Greek, it sounds Italian… It even sounds Indian to me, the scales that they use and the way the songs are composed in a very modal way; we set a song in a *raga* and we stick to that one particular scale. It's relatable for me because of that, and the raspiness of the lead voice, he seems old, but the energy is so young. It's captivating, powerful, danceable, happy… My kind of music.

## Tinariwen
*Aman Iman: Water is Life*
(Craft Recordings, 2007)

I discovered this through *Songlines*, it got a *Top of the World* review! I was drawn to them by their against-the-odds story. Also, when you get an instrument which is not your traditional instrument and you figure out your own way to play it, and the rest of the world says 'wow.' And that sound: overdriven, cranked-up battered amps, how naturally they are imperfectly beautiful. They try to represent their own culture and language and their poetry, their stories, but at the same time they reach out to the world through that overdriven guitar. And how the whole family gets involved, passing on traditions through generations, it's so beautiful to see that happening.

*INTERVIEW BY RUSS SLATER JOHNSON*

**+ *The Raghu Dixit Project*** *are touring the UK from July 6-28 to promote Shakkar, their new album*

Cimafunk, guests and audience members on stage at CimaFest 2024; Below: La Dame Blanche

# Throwing Down that Cuban Funk

*In its second edition, Cimafunk's CimaFest has proven itself as a Havana-style New Orleans throwdown connecting clave across borders.* ***Catalina Maria Johnson*** *reports…*

Cimafunk has taken his electric blend of Afro-Cuban soul and funk worldwide since he exploded onto international stages in 2019 after a legendary performance at Austin, TX's SXSW. Born in Pinar del Rio in western Cuba, Cimafunk's current home base is New Orleans, and his annual CimaFest adds a fresh experience to one of the most celebrated musical cities in the world.

In 2023, during the first weekend of New Orleans' famed Jazz & Heritage Festival, Cimafunk threw the inaugural CimaFest. This extended concert's guests included master Afro-Cuban percussionist Pedrito Martinez and virtuosic flautist and vocalist La Dame Blanche along with New Orleans greats such as Big Chief Juan Pardo of the Golden Comanche Mardi Gras Indians. It was an exhilarating four-plus hours, as joyful raucousness shook the Beaux Arts rafters of downtown New Orleans' venerable Civic Theatre.

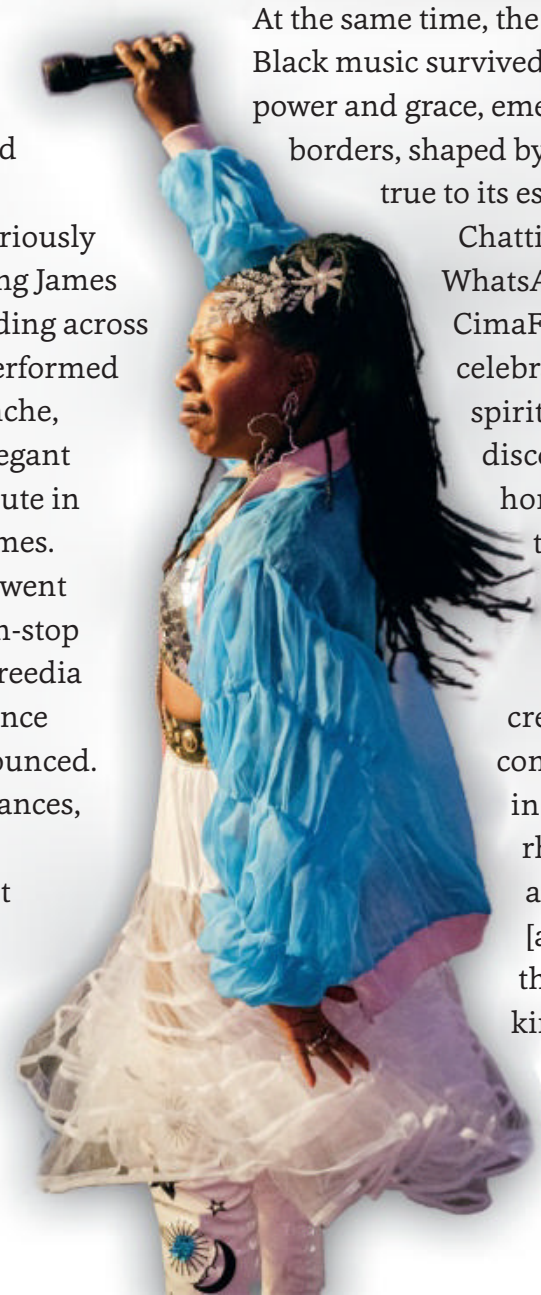
This year, Cimafunk returned to the Civic Theatre with his second CimaFest, again featuring a series of stellar guests: legendary Afro-Cuban pianist Chucho Valdés, Afro-Cuban vocalist and multi-instrumentalist X Alfonso, a repeat visit by La Dame Blanche and from New Orleans, Big Freedia, a renowned icon of that city's unique style of hip-hop know as bounce music.

The result was a mélange of non-stop musical deliciousness spearheaded by Cimafunk and La Tribu, his crack team of musicians. Together, La Tribu's eight musicians – Hilaria Cacao (trombone), Katy Cacao (sax), Arthurito 'El Wao' (keys), Machete (percussion), Big Happy (percussion and vocals), Bejuco (guitar), Smokes (bass) and Dr Zapa, the musical director and drummer — masterfully created a musical vortex in and out of which Cimafunk and his guests could weave.

Cimafunk's dance moves, furiously fluid and adorned with dazzling James Brown flourishes, had him gliding across the stage as he and La Tribu performed with each guest. La Dame Blanche, who has perfected the art of elegant swagger, deployed masterful flute in between dancehall-tinged rhymes. Piano maestro Chucho Valdés went from lyrical to explosive in non-stop cascades of riffing notes. Big Freedia motivated the audience to bounce parts of bodies never before bounced. After their individual performances, all guests joined in on a final, explosive jam. The effervescent energy had a thousand or so attendees shaking quite a few funky feathers.

According to the Mardi Gras dictionary, in New Orleans parlance, a 'throwdown' is an occasion to frolic and make merry, and CimaFest holds true to that definition. To experience it is to witness a glorious family reunion of Black music grooves once separated by the vicissitudes of colonial pasts. At the same time, the fest celebrates how Black music survived those difficult eras with power and grace, emerging triumphant across borders, shaped by the diaspora yet ever true to its essence.

Chatting with Cimafunk via WhatsApp, he shares that CimaFest is, at its heart, a celebration of the common spirit he continues to discover in his new hometown: the music, the enjoyment and the energy of the street. The best part about the festival he created, he adds, is the common heritage evident in the spiritual and rhythmic music: "We all become a *mazacote* [a unified mass] within the same groove in all kinds of ways. Once the night starts, we don't want to stop!"



Katie Sikora

# Fiesta Time

*Since forming in 2021, New Regency Orchestra have ignited Latin big band fever in London. With a debut album now out,* ***Izzy Felton*** *speaks to the group's founder Lex Blondin*

Sitting among London's vibrant music landscape is an ever-growing Latin jazz scene and at its heart is the Afro-Cuban jazz group New Regency Orchestra. Their self-titled debut album is a reworking of tracks from the Latin music scenes of 1950s NYC. Its founder, music curator and DJ, Lex Blondin, discovered his love for the greats of 1950s salsa, mambo and Afro-Cuban jazz in his late teens. "I was very obsessed with hip-hop and jazz," Blondin says. "I recognised that the same energy that's in hip-hop was in salsa too. That was my way in."

Fast forward to lockdown and, with a lot of time on his hands, Blondin started looking through Discogs for more of the music from that golden era. And the more unknown the better. "I've always wanted to do a project with [Afro-Cuban jazz]. During lockdown, I was writing down ideas, selecting tunes and decided I very much wanted to prove that this music was worth people's time because, for me, it's the best."

And then came New Regency Orchestra – the origins of the band started with one pivotal phone call between Blondin and festival booker Noah Ball, when Ball approached Blondin for ideas for a big band to play at a new London festival. Blondin got straight on the phone with Eliane Correa, a composer and pianist who splits her time between Latin music projects in London and Havana, to get her on board as bandleader for his new project.

Performing live in 2022

Oliver Villegas; Anna Francesca Jennings

It will come as no surprise that organising an 18-piece big band can, at times, be a logistical nightmare. "We've involved around 60-70 musicians in this project," Blondin says. "It takes a lot of Google polls." But with the musical talents of people like Eliane, who arranged the tracks that Lex selected for the record, New Regency Orchestra's debut album was completed in under a year.

"We recorded all of this in our studio, which fits like seven people," says Blondin. "Getting everyone to be there in the same room at the same time was pretty impossible. So [Eliane] organised it in chunks and recorded all the parts at home on her computer, so that any part of the band that came in had something to work from. Honestly, I would have never been able to do it without her."

The tracks on the album are a mix of famous salsa, mambo and Afro-Cuban jazz hits, and some that are a bit more niche. In the latter category is 'Scarlet Mambo Hour', a track from the 1956 crime film *The Scarlet Hour*. "I stumbled upon that track by really just scraping the bottom of Discogs. It makes me move my head as if it were a grime track – it's got the same tempo. But it's also got this epic kind of film noir, Gotham City vibe, with dark crazy arrangements. The whole album is crap, but that track blew my mind."

Blondin explains that the aim of reworking the tracks is not to turn them into something completely new but to pick out the best parts and make them bigger by using the power of modern-day technology. "I think the musicians would dig [the reworked tracks] because if they recorded them in our age, they probably would have gone for a similar sound," he says. "And so hopefully Tito Puente would approve."

This June, the group perform at Scala in London. But how will the reworked tracks – mostly spiced up in post-production – translate live? "It's a bit more fluid, a constant work in progress, but the live shows are getting to a good place where arrangements are tight as hell, but there's still enough looseness so that there can be some breathing and self-expression. Mostly it's just about keeping [the music] cooking for moments when one person shines with a killer solo."

While this is a passion project for Blondin, there is something bigger at work. With jazz acts like Mercury prize-winners Ezra Collective incorporating Latin genres into their latest album *Where I'm Meant to Be*, it's clear Latin music is having a moment in the UK. "Part of the hidden goal of this is that we're gonna blast some Latin music to a wider audience. But also, I want everyone that comes to play in the band, that wasn't aware of this music before, to be influenced in some way." With New Regency Orchestra growing in confidence – and planning a follow-up album of original songs – this scene has plenty of room for growth yet.

***+ New Regency Orchestra*** *is reviewed on p65.*
*The band play London's Scala on June 27*

TAKE NOTE

# Ars Nova Napoli

With the districts of Naples full of tourists, one of the city's emblematic bands has moved onto the world stage where their streetwise Neapolitan soul remains resolutely intact, as ***Simon Broughton*** discovers

I can't think of any group that represents the spirit and soul of Naples better than Ars Nova Napoli. They've played in China, Korea, India and all over Europe, so their UK debut – thanks to WOMAD – is long overdue. Their name, frankly, sounds a bit boring, but the musicians are certainly not. I've seen them in a couple of formulations: on their own and doing a brilliant collaboration with a brass band. They have grown out of Naples' *posteggiatori* (street music) scene and evoke the special atmosphere of local city districts, strong communities and a love of partying.

The line-up is vocals, accordion, mandolin, violin, guitar bass and percussion. It's accordionist Marcello Squillante who fills me in on the band's 15-year history. It started with Squillante, mandolinist Vincenzo Racioppi and percussionist Antonino Anastazia, who played together at school. They were invited to join another school project and went on the bus. "On the way we practised the song and the people on the bus gave us money, actually a lot of money," says Squillante. "And suddenly we thought we have a line of work in music."

They connected with musicians playing on the streets of central Naples – now, this is impossible because tourism has brought too many people into the city so there's simply no space. At the time they were playing for locals, then they were invited to a festival in France. That's when the group was born.

"We love the music of Napoli and the folk music of south Italy," says Squillante, "but every member of the band has another big love. Our mandolinist goes often to Brazil to play *choro*, our percussionist loves south Italian folk and *tammurriata*, but often goes to Iran and the Middle East to learn that music, and we all love Balkan and Greek music and wanted to search for similar music around the world."

Vincenzo Racioppi is the group's mandolin player. He was a percussionist and then travelled to south America and fell in love with the *charango*. After learning that instrument, he went to the conservatoire in Naples to learn mandolin. For me the mandolin, with its delicate plucked strings, is the most representative Neapolitan instrument, but Squillante says: "The most important instrument of Naples is the voice. In Napoli we say if you don't have a singer you don't have a band."

Their last album, *E Senza Acqua la Terra More* (Without Water the Land Died) is their first containing original songs, mostly based on characters from Naples. There are a couple from Davide Puffo Chimenti, "one of the great street musicians of the city," including 'Canzone della Vela' and another whose words come from a guy who worked in a shop behind Squillante's home. They've also unearthed Neapolitan songs, like "Mbraccio a Mme' (recorded on 2016's *Chi Fatica Se More 'e Famme*) that travelled to Greece and got absorbed into the *rebetiko* tradition but got forgotten at home. Others will feature on a forthcoming album, recently recorded in Naples' Auditorium Novecento.

Ars Nova Napoli have recorded five albums since 2009, but only two, *Chi Fatica se More 'e Famme* and *E Senza Acqua la Terra More*, are 'official' with the Apogeo label, while the others were locally pressed to sell at gigs on the street.

What sort of songs are right for the band? "We like songs with energy and power," says Squillante. "But they are not always fast. 'Canzone della Vela' is a very slow song, but it still has energy. Napoli is a big metropolis with the spirit of a little village and I hope that everybody gets that energy from us." ◆

Alessandra Finelli

***+ Ars Nova Napoli** will perform at WOMAD (July 25-29).*
*'Canzone della Vela' features on this issue's compilation, track 12*

**DANCE CONSORTIUM** presents

Qudus Onikeku | The QDance Company

# Re:INCARNATION

An ode to the richness of Nigerian culture

FEATURING LIVE MUSIC!

**UK PREMIERE TOUR 2024**

**18 & 19 Sep**
LONDON
Southbank Centre

**21 Sep**
MILTON KEYNES
Milton Keynes Theatre

**24 & 25 Sep**
CANTERBURY
Marlowe Theatre

**1 & 2 Oct**
BRIGHTON
Dome

**5 Oct**
NOTTINGHAM
Playhouse

**8 & 9 Oct**
SALFORD
The Lowry

**11 & 12 Oct**
HULL
New Theatre

**15 & 16 Oct**
NEWCASTLE
Theatre Royal

**18 & 19 Oct**
EDINBURGH
Festival Theatre

**FOR INFO & TICKETS VISIT**
**DANCECONSORTIUM.COM**

Age guide 12+

dance consortium

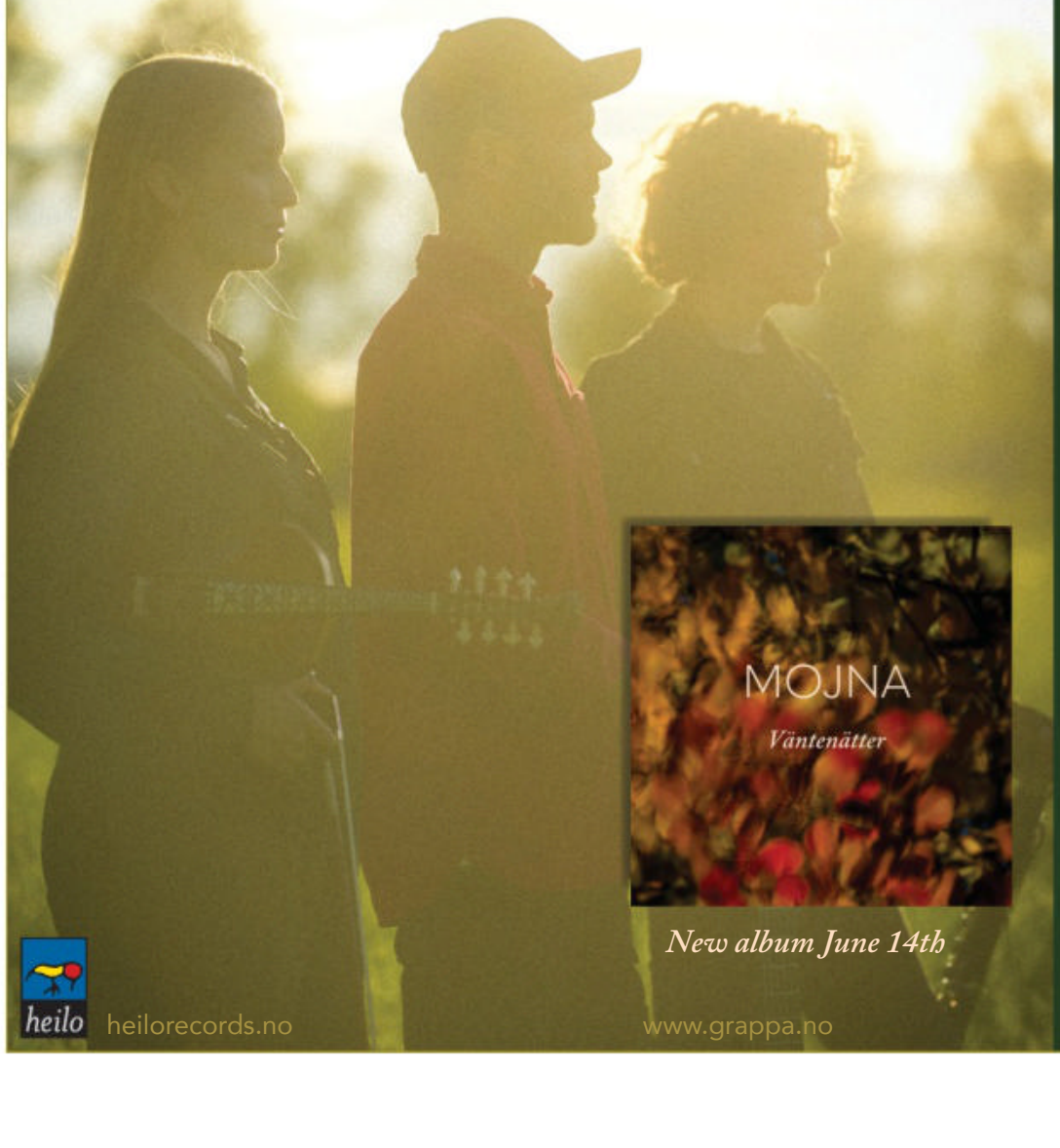
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

**'A tremendous piece. The QDance Company command the stage with Broadway-like showmanship'**
MONTREAL RAMPAGE



MOJNA

*Väntenätter*






*New album June 14th*

heilo

heilorecords.no

www.grappa.no

ODIN

**FLUKTEN**
-Flukten-
OUT NOW

HUBRO

**SPLASHGIRL**
+Robert Aiki
Aubrey Lowe
-More Human-
OUT NOW

odinrecords.bandcamp.no

hubromusic.com

# SPOTLIGHT

# Hermanos Gutiérrez

The genial guitar interplay of these Swiss-Ecuadorian brothers has earned them a growing fanbase fascinated by their 'cosmic sound.' With their new album, they've "elevated the experience," discovers ***Silvia Rothlisberger***

Alejandro and Estevan Gutiérrez were born in Switzerland, but their music is deeply rooted in Latin America – their mother is from Ecuador. This heritage is clear in the instrumental guitar soundscapes that the duo create, which are infused with rhythms and cadences learnt from *bolero*, *milonga*, *cumbia* and salsa. At the same time, their music is removed from these genres too, taking place in another space, a desert, the cosmos, a childhood neighbourhood, a nostalgic vision from the past. "We leave the space for each person to add their own personal journey," Alejandro tells me before their recent sold-out show at London's O2 Shepherd's Bush Empire.

They remember the day when they started to play the guitar together in Alejandro's flat in Zurich. Estevan had come to visit, "I told him to bring the guitar as I wanted to connect with my brother through music. I showed him some ideas I had for a song, and he added the melody," says Alejandro. "It felt so magical and natural. We felt that the song was complete, we didn't need a singer because our guitars were singing," Estevan continues. "My roommate was listening from the next room and he came and asked 'What band is that you're playing?' and we replied, 'It's us!'" Alejandro exclaims.

At that moment they realised they were onto something and started to think about who they were. "I take great inspiration from salsa music, so I thought of Hermanos Lebrón [Lebrón Brothers] and suddenly we knew," Estevan says as he snaps his fingers. "Hermanos Gutiérrez!"

They began crafting instrumental guitar songs with no need for a singer or lyrics – the magic was flowing through them. Their childhood memories, and their visits to Ecuador while growing up in Switzerland,

are a constant source of inspiration. Their grandfather introduced them to the artist Julio Jaramillo, an Ecuadorian singer from the 50s, known as 'The Nightingale of America'. "Our grandfather showed us how a person can cry from [fraught] emotion and happiness at the same time. He was a very emotional and beautiful person, and as a result a great inspiration," says Alejandro.

In 2017 they recorded their first album, *8 Años* (8 Years), in Berlin, the title referencing the age difference between the two brothers. "It all happened very organically and naturally," says Estevan. This album was followed by *El Camino de mi Alma* (2018), *Hoy Como Ayer* (2019), *Hijos del Sol* (2020) and *Eternamente* (2021). Their music began reaching more and more people until Dan Auerbach, the guitarist and vocalist of nu-blues band The Black Keys, heard Hermanos Gutiérrez and wanted to work with them. Auerbach, also a much-in-demand producer, produced their two latest albums, *El Bueno y El Malo* (2022) and this year's *Sonido Cósmico* (2024).

*El Bueno y El Malo*, was nominated for Album of the Year at the 2023 Americana Music Honors & Awards. It's an album that evokes the soundtracks of spaghetti Western films, like Ennio Morricone's score for *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, and it gave the brothers a 'music from the desert' tagline.

With *Sonido Cósmico*, they wanted to uproot from the desert. "We didn't want to repeat ourselves and write *El Bueno y El Malo Volume Two*, so we started to work on new ideas until suddenly we found this special sound. It was a magical moment and very beautiful as we realised that we elevated the Hermanos Gutiérrez experience from the desert to the universe to space. That's how *Sonido Cósmico* was conceived," Estevan explains.

Their songs are born from a feeling, a memory, an imagined place, or a moment in their life. 'Lágrimas Negras' was written last year when on tour. "I was playing the guitar in my room. Though I never play in hotel rooms, that day I was longing for home, for my sons and started to play," Estevan says. He then showed the idea to his brother Alejandro while doing soundcheck and "as always" his brother played what was missing in the song.

'Abuelita' comes from their Ecuadorian roots. "We saw a village, children, the life in Latin America and we thought of our family, our roots. This song has a special meaning because 'Abuelita' is our grandmother but is also [about] our mum," Estevan says. Alejandro is a record collector of Peruvian cumbia and Estevan of salsa from the 60s; these two genres have deeply affected their music. "We listen very attentively to the unique sounds of cumbia and salsa from the 60s and get inspiration from it," says Alejandro. The title-track of *Sonido Cósmico* (Cosmic Sound) is a clear example, as there is a song by Los Mirlos called 'Sonido Amazónico' (Amazonic Sound) and they liked that idea of a song that describes a specific atmosphere. "That's one of the many ways cumbia has inspired us," Alejandro says. "I want people to connect that cosmic sound with Hermanos Gutiérrez."

**"[When we first played together,] my roommate was listening from the next room and he came and asked 'What band is that you're playing?' and we replied, 'It's us!'"**

They both arrived at the guitar via different paths. Estevan learned to play when he was eight years old. The first song his teacher taught him was a milonga from Argentina. "I fell in love with this sound that brings melancholy and nostalgia. During my first 15 years, I only played milongas and that's why I play the guitar with the finger-picking style," Estevan says. Alejandro, on the other hand, learned to play via YouTube tutorials. "Estevan was always playing the guitar at home and when he left, I was longing for that sound in our house," Alejandro explains. "At that time, I lived in Ecuador and when I came back he could play the guitar. I was very impressed," Estevan continues.

During our conversation, the two brothers have this dynamic where they take turns answering the questions or one answers half of it and the other answers the second half. When they create new songs, one starts playing a new idea and the other knows exactly what the song needs to be complete; their sound centres on the interplay between the two of them switching between lead and rhythm guitar roles.

"Sometimes when people ask what kind of music we play? Pff! It's not easy. It isn't Latin music, it isn't salsa, nor cumbia, it's not Western. Our music can't be pinpointed," Estevan says. Though they're inspired by the music they first heard through their grandfather in Ecuador and their passion for milonga, salsa and cumbia, "what we played from day one was Hermanos Gutiérrez," Estevan says bluntly.

The brothers' special connection has been described as ineffable, just like their wordless music. They thread stories with their guitars and enrich any space with their music passing this energy onto the audience. As they play at London Shepherd's Bush Empire, the audience is enthralled; the brothers have taken them on a road trip to the desert and as they introduce the songs of the new album, the energy reaches higher, for the stars. ◆

+ ***Sonido Cósmico*** *is reviewed this issue, see p51. 'Abuelita' is on our compilation, track 11*

Larry Niehaus

# SIMON SAYS…

Neither church nor opera house, **Simon Broughton** visits a very special music venue and recording studio in Naples

One of the must intriguing musical locations in Naples is a recording studio that is probably the first on continental Europe. The Gramophone Company opened a pretty humble studio in Covent Garden, London in 1898, while the Phonotype label at the Auditorium Novecento started recording music in 1910. It's a pretty substantial space, a precursor of Abbey Road, which opened in 1931. They began with mainly opera arias by Verdi and Puccini, but eventually delved into a whole history of Neapolitan song. There are corridors of tape archives underneath the recording studio, but they need to be moved because the conditions aren't suitable for preserving them. It's located right in the heart of town, two minutes walk from San Domenico Maggiore and Spaccanapoli.

Having been shut for years, it's now reopened as a recording studio – the upcoming album by Ars Nova Napoli was recorded there – and as a concert venue. You have to buzz a button on the street to enter and the foyer – where they serve wine and other drinks – has wonderful 70s designs on the walls. It's a glorious time warp.

It seems strange going to a concert in a recording studio, but actually it's a nice intimate environment for a small gig of 100-150 people. I've come for a solo performance by *organetto* (button accordion) player Alessandro d'Alessandro. He's on a platform and there are seats laid out in the studio – the window to the control room is behind. Yes it's a solo performance, but d'Alessandro is a master of knobs, pedals and loops. The organetto is small, but the technology is big, with lots of gizmos, cables and microphones.

Alessandro d'Alessandro at Auditorium Novecento; Bottom left: the studio's tape archives

The music is beguiling, at first melancholy as he plays with grimaces and deep gasping sighs on the accordion. It speeds up and he's tapping both sides of the instrument and looping them to create a powerful rhythmic background. His performance is quite a dance and his red trainers are an important ingredient in it. But it's also lovely when it just comes back to the pure instrument itself. Alessandro has been playing since he was nine and his instrument, which he's had for 25 years, is made by Castagnari, the Rolls Royce of accordion makers in Italy. It has a sweet and plangent sound.

Some of the music is his, but he also comes up with 'Can't Help Falling in Love', with a scrunchy looped beat and a wonderful dance-like song of Argentinean Atahualpa Yupanqui. It's magical hearing all this in this historic temple of Neapolitan music with its metres of historic recordings slowly festering beneath. Naples resident Ciro de Rosa will be doing a fuller story on the history of Auditorium Novecento soon for *Songlines*. This great location is taking on a dynamic new lease of life. ◆

Simon Broughton

## Next Issue…

**August/September 2024 (#200)**
On sale July 19

Fittingly, for our 200th issue, we have an all-star line-up planned. Expect interviews with **Leyla McCalla, Derek Gripper & Ballaké Sissoko**, **Billy Bragg**, **Joe Boyd**, **Jake Xerxes Fussell** and, with apartheid now 30 years behind us, we speak to **Peter Gabriel** about the lasting impact of 'Biko'. We have a *Beginner's Guide* to **Kronos Quartet** as their members change for the first time in almost 50 years, we will be looking at island culture with features on **Malta**, **Rapa Nui** and the **Channel Islands**, and we will be going in-depth on **Notting Hill Carnival**. Plus, **Thandiswa**, **Orquesta Romantica Milonguera**, **Gambiana**, **Aidan O'Rourke**, and **Staples Jr Singers** in a celebratory issue.

Leyla McCalla

Chris Scheurich

# FEEDBACK

*Letters, shout-outs, comments, emails and everything in between*

## Get in touch – we'd love to hear from you!


**WEBSITE** songlines.co.uk

**EMAIL** letters@songlines.co.uk

**X** @SonglinesMag

**FACEBOOK** facebook.com/songlines

**INSTAGRAM** @SonglinesMag


### Thanks for the Music

Thanks for letting me know about so many great artists over the years, both overseas and from the US. If I tried to list them this would turn into a ridiculously long email, but I have to mention Souad Massi whose wild show in Chicago when she released *Deb* I wouldn't have seen if not for *Songlines*. Algerian (I assume) men were dancing in the aisles and repeatedly trying to climb up on the stage as women were ululating from their seats – completely unexpected and quite gratifying mayhem along with her wonderful singing!

*Jim Chapman, Pittsburgh, PA US*

### Notes from Tasmania

Greetings from Tasmania. Once a month I travel 30 kilometres from my remote location to the local newsagent to pick up my copy of *Songlines*. I have had a subscription through the newsagent for 15 years and was horrified to find that I no longer receive the CD with the magazine. I don't do online transactions for a number of reasons, one of which is impossible internet connections. So, now without the CD and still paying the same price, I'm not sure I want to continue my subscription. My newsagent is now being taken out of the loop as a provider of my magazine with a disc.

I have purchased many CDs over many years from reviewing your discs, so the ramifications are widespread. This whole process is very disappointing and I'm hoping you can rethink this policy as I'm sure I'm not the only person affected by this change.

*B Cawthorne, Tasmania*

### Further CD Concerns

I have been purchasing *Songlines* at Canadian news stands for more than 20 years. Are the *Top of the World* CDs no longer available for news stand buyers? Thanks.

*Wayne, Canada*

### Editor's Response

*Hey both, I can definitely understand your concerns about the lack of a covermount CD at news stands. It's not ideal, but we made the tough decision after it became clear that it was no longer sustainable to include the CD with retail copies. To give some context, sales of magazines can be low percentage-wise at newsagents. If we sent 10,000 magazines to newsagents, it's possible only 3,000-5,000 of these will sell. The rest will be recycled. However, covermount CDs can't be recycled and so would be destroyed. This is a huge environmental cost. On top of that is the financial cost. With the cost of CDs rising along with other costs, such as paper, it's hard to justify producing so many CDs that will simply never be sold. We have made our compilation available as a download with each issue that hasn't included a CD, as we don't want anyone to miss it. But, more than that, we are encouraging our readers to subscribe as the best way of experiencing Songlines. Subscribing will mean receiving the CD with every issue, and as all our subscriptions come with access to our website and digital archive you will also gain lots of extras too. If you'd like to enquire about our subscriptions please call +44 (0)1722 716997, email subscriptions@markallengroup.com or visit songlines.co.uk/subscribe. And do please feel free to send me any feedback via russ@songlines.co.uk as we try and find a way of delivering the magazine that pleases as many people as possible and also means that we are financially equipped to keep Songlines alive.*

*Sincerely,*

*Russ (Ed)*

## COMPETITIONS

**WIN**

**New Regency Orchestra's self-titled debut** p17

We have three copies of this exciting release to give away.

To enter, answer:

***How many members make up this epic big band?***

**The Zawose Queens' *Maisha*** p30

We have three CDs of this uplifting album up for grabs.

To enter, answer:

***In which town is the Zawose village located?***

***The Joy* from South African stars The Joy** p32

One of ten CD copies of this much-anticipated record might be yours!

To enter, answer:

***Which song on the album was inspired by the singers' fathers?***

COMPETITIONS Submit your entry for each competition via the website: **songlines.co.uk/competitions**. Winners will be chosen at random. Only one entry per competition per household. No cash alternatives. If you would prefer not to be sent details of other *Songlines* products and services, or products from other carefully selected companies, please tick the relevant box on the entry form. Closing date for this issue's competitions (unless otherwise stated): August 2 2024

## AT SHORT NOTICE

**[In response to our *Essential 10* Bagpipes] Maybe creating International Bagpipe Day 12 years ago helped raise awareness about this amazing instrument? Thanks for putting this playlist together!**

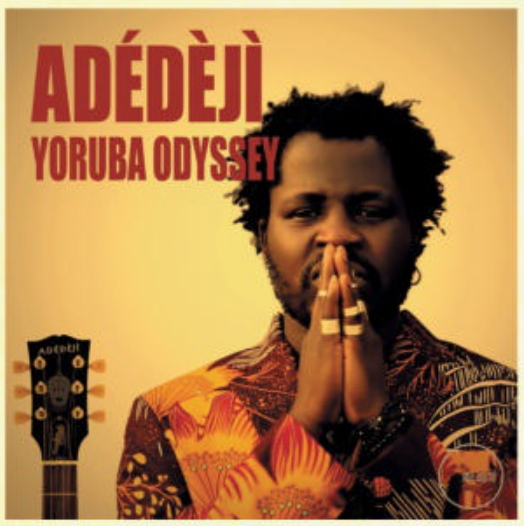
*From: Cassandre Balbar on Facebook*

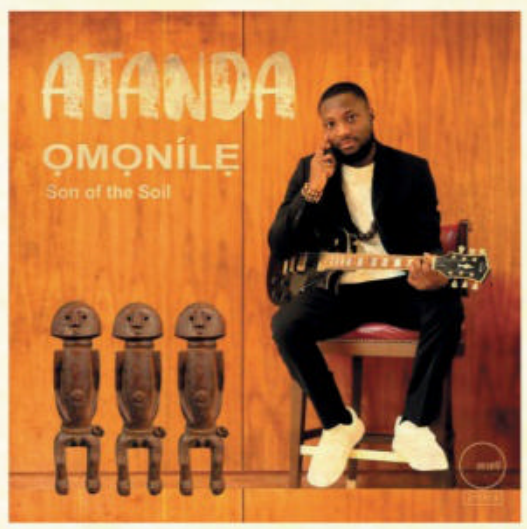
**Was special to see the great @Vieuxfarkatoure live last night [at] @KingsPlace doing a Gaza fundraiser courtesy of @SonglinesMag & @EarthCruises.**

*From: LinaKhatibUK*

**Tuesday am music: *Johnny Otis Show*, live in London 1972… @SonglinesMag May 2024 download (Mohammed Syfkhan, Ngwaka Son Systéme wow!) & bargain basement find: *Virgin Directory of World Music*… 1991!**

*From: @TonyBurke2010*





One World Records Proudly Presents

# ADÉDÈJÌ

## 24 WOMEX SELECTION

ADÉDÈJÌ ON TOUR
25. July Jazz y Mas, Tenerife, Canarias, Spain
26. July Jazz y Mas, Las Palmas, Canarias, Spain
27.July Sines Festival, Sines, Portugal
26. October WOMEX, Manchester, UK
02. Nov Festival Au Tour des Cordes, St Louis, Senegal

www.oneworldsmusic.com

©℗ONE WORLD RECORDS

Photo, Styling & Art Direction Carolina Vallejo ©One World Records 2024

Luc Jennepin

# OBITUARIES

## Hasna el Becharia (1950-2024)

*Ground-breaking Algerian singer*

Affectionately known across North Africa as 'The Desert Rocker,' Hasna el Becharia passed away early May in her native Saharan city, Béchar, situated in the mountainous south-western Saoura region of Algeria. She was 74. From a young age, Hasna was profoundly inspired by *diwan*, the Algerian Gnawa, where both sacred and profane songs of the Black African former slaves intertwine. Music was constantly present in her household as her father was a Gnawa master of ceremony, a *maalem*. However, Hasna was prohibited to touch his *gimbri*, the emblematic bass lute, as it was forbidden to women. In the 2022 documentary *The Desert Rocker*, Hasna reveals that she broke this social barrier by secretly making her own instrument, becoming one of the first women to master the gimbri, as well as electric guitar. She became increasingly popular in the 70s, playing locally at weddings and then throughout the Maghreb countries before moving onto international circles from 2001, inspiring future generations of North African female musicians. With her warm sense of humour and deep voice, Hasna portrayed a model of liberty, bravery and generosity, but because of this she was sometimes physically threatened. She would often welcome women into her home who had been repudiated by their husbands. Her songs alluded to a love of her country, the desert, her deep faith, but also evoked treachery, hypocrisy and suffering. Algerian singer and close friend, Souad Asla, told me: "Hasna was a pioneer, a spiritual mother and a healer. Arriving on stage one day, someone shouted 'The blessing has arrived!'" *PIERRE CUNY*

### *And farewell to...*

**Palle Danielsson** (1946-2024): a Swedish jazz double bassist best known as a member of Keith Jarrett's quartet, he also performed with Jan Garbarek and Peter Erskine, though *Songlines* readers may know him best for his spell in Argentine *bandoneón* maestro Dino Saluzzi's trio... **Muluken Melesse** (1954-2024): a hugely popular Ethiopian singer who recorded through the 70s and 80s. Many will know Melesse from the three tracks that open Buda Musique's *Ethiopiques 1* (1997) compilation. Melesse moved to the US in 1984 and eventually gave up music to devote himself to the Pentecostal Church... **Phil Wiggins** (1954-2024): a virtuoso harmonica player known for playing the Piedmont blues, Wiggins came to notice for his work in the duo Cephas & Wiggins. After John Cephas, the group's guitarist and singer, died, Wiggins continued performing with other artists, even singing from time to time. In 2017, he was awarded a National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts (US).

After announcing his retirement in 2018, Malian singer and musician **Salif Keita** has slowly returned to the spotlight following a series of shows last year. Now, he's making the comeback official with an extraordinary new album. ***Robin Denselow*** finds out why Africa's 'Golden Voice' just couldn't keep away

# NEVER CAN **SAY GOODBYE**

Salif Keita is one of the most adventurous, gloriously soulful singer-songwriters on the planet, and a man who likes to surprise. When he released his last album *Un Autre Blanc* in 2018, it was announced that this would be the last studio release from the great Malian veteran. And yet here he was in 2024, sitting in a London hotel room, playing guitar and talking about his next two albums and the intimate and historic appearance he would be making at *Songlines*' 25th-anniversary show at the Barbican the following day. So, no retirement then? He laughs. "People convinced me to record again. And I'm happy."

Those lucky enough to have seen him at the Barbican will know that he's still on remarkable form. Dressed in a magnificent gold robe and hat, he perched on a stool, playing acoustic guitar, accompanied only by the *kora* of Madou Diabaté, Toumani Diabaté's younger brother. Their exquisite, unplugged set included new versions of songs from five of his albums and ended with a remarkable new song, 'Proud'. Here he showed off his vocal range on an emotional piece that suddenly erupted into a flurry of rapid-fire phrasing as he burst into English to announce '*I'm African and proud*.'

That song also provides the finale for Salif's next album *So Kono*, which he aims to release later this year. It's an acoustic, minimalist set on which Salif and his guitar are accompanied not by kora, but Badjé Tounkara's *ngoni* playing, with calabash percussion from Mamadou Koné. It was recorded in a hotel room in Japan, while Salif was on tour there, because "NØ FØRMAT! [the record label] pushed me to do it. They had been asking for an acoustic album for a long time, and finally it was a good moment!"

> "NØ FORMAT had been asking for an acoustic album… finally it was a good moment"

In many ways, this is a long-awaited follow-up to *Moffou*, the much-praised, largely acoustic album Salif released in 2002. But while *Moffou* included tracks on which he was accompanied only by his acoustic guitar, there were other songs where he was backed by electric guitar, along with traditional instruments including ngoni and *djembé*. There is no hint of any amplification on this more stripped-back set, which includes new versions of tracks from *M'Bemba* (2005) and a new treatment of 'Soundiata', the praise song to his celebrated ancestor who founded the Malian empire in the 13th century, which he sang with the Rail Band at the start of their career. And then there are the new songs, including one praising the late Kanté Manfila, the guitarist with whom he worked in Les Ambassadeurs, and who played on several of Salif's albums, including *M'Bemba*. "He was a wonderful guitarist and a teacher," says Salif. "He showed me so many things about music." As for 'Proud': "It's very new. I am what I am, and I'm proud!"

Salif performing at Kyotophonie, Japan, in 2023; Left: At the Barbican for *Songlines*' 25th-anniversary show earlier this year

Salif is spending this summer on an extensive tour, taking in much of Europe, the US, South Africa and even Zimbabwe (but sadly no further dates in the UK), and has already started work on the album that will follow *So Kono*, scheduled for release next year. It will involve his full band, along with special guests "not decided yet." And it will have a highly original musical theme – which is still a secret.

It's the latest instalment in a long and extraordinary story, in which Salif succeeded against all the odds. Coming from a noble family, he was never supposed to be a musician – that was the work of the *griot* families, the hereditary praise singers. As he was born with albinism he was ostracised and bullied when he was growing up. He wanted to become a teacher but was told that couldn't happen because, he recalls, "I was scaring the children."

Salif says that he was 20 when he became aware of his extraordinary voice and realised he could have a career in music. He sang in Bamako's clubs and then joined the legendary Rail Band, before leaving to join their great rivals Les Ambassadeurs (where Kanté Manfila, the pioneering guitarist who mixed Malian and Western styles, was *chef d'orchestre*). In 1978 the political situation in Mali led the band to move to the Ivory Coast, where the group recorded 'Mandjou', a homage to Guinean President Sekou Touré, who had honoured Salif in 1976.

His first solo album *Soro* (1987) was a sensation, with his extraordinary voice matched with electronica and keyboards. He went on to record with US jazz stars and his hero Carlos Santana "who was wonderful," before releasing the acoustic *Moffou*. Later albums have included production work from Gotan Project's Philippe Cohen Solal on *Talé* (2012), while *Un Autre Blanc* included collaborations with Angélique Kidjo and Ladysmith Black Mambazo.

So why these constant changes in musical direction? "I learn from different situations. I have different inspirations." Did the fact that he is not a griot make that easier? "Yes, of course. They follow one tradition, but I work with different musicians to learn about music." Did he find it frustrating that he received far more praise for acoustic albums like *Moffou* than some of his jazz-funk fusion releases? "The English like acoustic styles… but people like different styles in different places. At festivals, people like big bands and lots of people on stage. It's not frustrating. It's gratifying."

Salif is one of the heroes of the glory years of Malian music – an era when he and compatriots such as Ali Farka Touré, Toumani Diabaté and Rokia Traoré made this land-locked country on the edge of the Sahara world-famous for its extraordinary musicians. So, what is happening in Mali now? ▸

Above:
Salif live in Prague (2023)

He had been a genial but not over-talkative interviewee, with his international manager Carolina Vallejo providing the translation when he switched from English to French, but now he suddenly becomes far more animated. The situation in Mali clearly worries him. "There are many new artists who are rappers, but there are few who are musicians. They do it with machines. They are not musicians – and it's the same everywhere in Africa. The youth are into machines. You can sample a kora so a keyboard sounds like a kora, but it's not the same thing."

He is so concerned that he has organised a festival in September this year to encourage young musicians who play traditional instruments. It will take the form of a competition, happening across the country, with the winners from each region meeting in the capital Bamako for the final. Those playing keyboards or guitar will not be able to enter, but kora, *balafon* and ngoni players will, of course, be welcome. Salif says "We are about to lose our traditional instruments – that's why we are holding this festival. In Bamako in September, you will be able to see all the traditional instruments. And Bamako is not dangerous."

> "The youth are into machines… We are about to lose our traditional instruments"

Mali has faced serious political and security problems in recent years, and the previous government's failure to deal with attacks by armed Islamist groups has been cited as one of the causes of the military coup in 2021 (the second in nine months), after which Colonel Assimi Goïta took control. Salif caused controversy when it was announced that he had been appointed a Special Adviser to Goïta. This was a few years after he was quoted as saying "democracy is not a good thing for Africa… people have to understand democracy, and how can people understand when 85% of the people in the country cannot read or write?"

When I begin to ask about this, Carolina steps in: "We are really not allowed to speak about politics – he is a cultural person," to which Salif adds: "If you start talking about politics and who is the president, then maybe next year it changes – it's not a good idea. I'm neutral. I love my country, and I love culture."

But wasn't he a Special Adviser? "I work with the Culture Minister," says Salif "but I'm not otherwise involved." "Salif came up with the idea for the festival," says Carolina "and they said yes, it's a great idea. He can make things happen."

And what about that quote about democracy? "I never said democracy was wrong for Africa," Salif replies, "I don't know anything about politics!" To which Carolina adds: "Salif loves democracy. He supports the government who are there now because it's what the people wanted."

Salif will be 75 in August, and he says he's spending more time at Djataland, his island on the Niger River. But for a man who is supposed to have retired, he is remarkably busy. Apart from the albums, the touring and the music contest, he continues to support those, like himself, who suffer from albinism, through his Global Foundation. "This year," he says. "I'm building a hospital for albinos in Bamako that will specialise in the skin problems they can suffer from." And is there now less discrimination against albinos because of his international success? "Much less," he replies. ◆

Anna Šolcová © One World Records; Jamie Hodgskin

One World Records Proudly Presents

# SALIF KEITA

## WORLD TOUR 2024, 2025

22. June Union Scene, Drammen, Norway
28. June The Maslow Time Square, Pretoria, South Africa
04. July Adda Simfonia Alicante, Alicante, Spain
05. July Sala Apolo, Barcelona Spain
06. July Noches del Botanico, Madrid, Spain
07. July Afrika Festival Hertme, The Netherlands
14. July Festival Gwoka, Guadaloupe
15. - 30. September Tour USA & Canada
11. November Leverkusener Jazztage, Germany
16. November Johannesburg Jazzfest, South Africa
01. December Soweto, South Africa
07. December African Voices Festival, Harare, Zimbabwe
15. February Stora Teatern, Göteborg, Sweden (2025)
02.-03. May African Vibration Music Festival, Dallas, Texas, USA (2025)
& more dates to come...

.one world

www.oneworldsmusic.com

Photo Al-fousseni Konate Art Direction Carolina Vallejo ©One World Records 2024

# THE QUEENS ARE COMING

You'd think being the daughter and granddaughter of one of Tanzania's most beloved musicians would make things easier, but **The Zawose Queens** have had to fight gender discrimination in order to release their own music. "We are part of the evolution," they tell ***Nigel Williamson***

For generations the only role permitted to women in the music of Tanzania's Wagogo people was to sing background harmonies while their male folk took the spotlight. The traditional instruments of Gogo music were also an exclusively male preserve, the only instrument women were permitted to play being a small drum known as *muheme*. Pendo and Leah Zawose, collectively known as The Zawose Queens, have resolutely set about changing all that.

"Women in our music were always behind the men and we were never allowed to take the lead," Pendo tells *Songlines* via a Zoom call from Dar es Salaam. "I was ten when I first joined my father on stage as a backing singer as that was all the tradition allowed," she explains.

Her father was none other than Hukwe Zawose, who died in 2003 at the age of 63, and will be known to many *Songlines* readers from the albums he recorded for Real World in the late 1990s and early 2000s; his spectacular WOMAD performances; or from supporting Peter Gabriel on his *Growing Up* world tour.

A natural '*showman with a five-octave voice*' who cut a striking figure on stage in traditional feather headdress, the family patriarch had seven wives and 17 children. He encouraged them all to learn and play Gogo music, but the role of the female members of the clan was still secondary and subservient.

Yet, over time, the role of the Zawose women in the family's music-making began to expand. Growing up in the Zawose village, a multi-generational commune on the edge of the coastal town of Bagamoyo with eight households spanning six plots of land on a dusty hillside sloping down to the Indian Ocean, Pendo and a younger generation of Zawose women started to question and then challenge the old taboos and prohibitions.

They began playing not only the muheme drum in concert, but the hypnotic metal *illimba* thumb pianos that are at the core of Gogo music. In addition, they played the traditional marimba xylophone and, when the men were not in sight, they secretly used the bowed four-string *chizeze*.

The family that plays together stays together, and after Hukwe's death his nephew Charles Zawose briefly took over leadership of the group – before his sudden death in

Michael Mbwambo; Courtesy of The Zawose Queens

Left: The Zawose Queens with the Wamwiduka Band, Oli Barton-Wood and Tom Excell; Above: on the beach in Bagamoyo

> “Bringing in electronic[s]… makes the music better and stronger”

2004 – while Msafiri Zawose became a solo star. By 2007, a younger generation including Pendo had regrouped as The Zawose Family to release the Real World album *Small Things Fall From the Baobab Tree*. They continued touring in various iterations with Pendo up front. “The role of women in our music had to evolve and we are part of the evolution. We decided we had to take it in our own hands,” Pendo explains.

Her niece Leah, who is Hukwe’s granddaughter, did not grow up in the family village but in Dar es Salaam. When she first arrived in her late grandfather’s commune, she was untrained in traditional music but literally pushed her way onto the stage during a performance by the family group for some Japanese tourists. There was much male disapproval, but she held her ground.

Fast forward to 2019 when the UK-based producers Oli Barton-Wood and Tom Excell visited Tanzania on a British Council project merging traditional East African music with electronic stylings, put together locally by Aziza Ongala, daughter of Remmy Ongala, another late Tanzanian artist who recorded for Real World.

“I needed to involve some women, which we always have a problem with in Tanzania as the families don’t allow women to fully express themselves musically and artistically,” Ongala explained. “I knew of the Zawoses because my father was on the WOMAD circuit with Hukwe… I brought [Leah and Pendo] into the project.”

Barton-Wood and Excel were so impressed that they subsequently suggested to Real World that they should return and record an album with the Zawose women. Suitably encouraged, Pendo and Leah began writing the songs which now grace The Zawose Queens’ debut album, *Maisha*.

Sonically, the 11 tracks range from the stripped-back, traditional-sounding to subtle but bold fusions. “The mix of our traditional music with the power of bringing in electronic music not only makes it more accessible, but it makes the music better and stronger, too,” Leah believes. “We wanted to blend the traditional and modern to create something new and to present our heritage to the world,” adds Pendo. A couple of songs were recorded on the beach in ambient style. “You can hear the wind and almost feel it on your face,” Leah says.

The lyrics are deeply rooted in lived experience. On the title-track (which translates simply as ‘Life’) they sing of the struggle for survival and ‘*looking for better life*.’ On ‘Fahari Yetu’ (Our Pride) they pay tribute to the rich Zawose musical heritage in which ‘*granddad is the roots, father is the trunk and I am the branches*.’ Other songs touch on love, motherhood, work and the other daily currencies of life. “To be authentic it was important to write about the things we know – our everyday existence and the hustle and struggle to make ends meet,” Pendo says.

Music retains a central place in daily life in the Zawose village, although the approach is now “less regimented” than in Hukwe’s time. “It’s hard because we sometimes have to seek different ways to find an income, but music is still a family business,” Leah explains. “We have uncles who make the traditional instruments to commission and different members of the family have their own bands.”

The Queens are about to undertake their first international tour and will perform at Glastonbury, WOMAD and Africa Oyé this summer. Asked what we can expect from their live show, they burst into a joyous song that renders any further questions superfluous.

“What we’re doing hasn’t been easy,” Pendo says. “It is expected in traditional circles that women should hold back. But by stepping forward we hope we can inspire other East African women to make their voices heard.” ◆

+ ***Maisha*** *is reviewed on p47. ‘Chidodo (feat Wamwiduka Band)’ is on our Top of the World compilation, track 5*

# NEW FAITH HEALERS

**The Joy** started their a capella singing in a small classroom in rural South Africa; now they're set to release their eponymous full-length album. "You can hear how we poured our hearts into the songs," they tell ***Emma Rycroft***

The Joy's first single, 'Isencane Lengane', is a warm farewell to a bride from her family. The music video flits between footage of the group's five members as young, skinny teenagers singing in a dark classroom to them a year older, in pastel suits, standing proudly in the valleys of Kwa-Zulu Natal, ready to take on the world. Their dancing and smiles are infectious, even as there's a poignancy to the song's reflections, with lyrics translating as, '*who would marry at such a young age? / married life is not an easy journey / she is still young, however she will grow*.'

One may equally ask, 'who would go into the music industry at such a young age?' But occasionally things just happen. Sometime in 2018 in Hammarsdale, a township in South Africa's KZN, five boys arrived early for school choir practice. One started a song to while away the time and the others joined in. "That day," says Duzie (Melokuhle Mkhungo) Hlophe, "we started planning rehearsals just on our own." The a capella group – comprising Pastor (Ntokozo Bright Magcaba), Duzie, Guduza (Sphelele Hlophe), Sthombe (Phelelani Sithole) and Marcus (Sanele Ngcobo) – named themselves The Joy and practised a blend of their influences: Ladysmith Black Mambazo, US gospel group The Walls and Zulu songs heard in church and at home.

> "We [grew] up going to church, listening to our grandfathers singing *shiyameni* and *isicathamiya*"

In 2019, they won the eThekwini Youth Talent Show. Soon after, Two Inch Punch (Ben Ash) flew to eThekwini (the region in which Hammarsdale is situated) to record 'Isencane Lengane'. Since the single came out, The Joy have finished school – enough of a trial for most teenagers – and released two EPs, *Amabutho* (2021) and *Hammarsdale* (2023). They have toured all over the world, too, appearing on Jennifer Hudson's US TV show and at Glastonbury to mention but two performances. Now they're set to release their self-titled debut on Transgressive Records. For all this, when I speak to them, they seem remarkably down to earth, even shy. Lead vocalist Duzie, however, takes charge and tells me how excited they are about *The Joy*, which was recorded in a North London church studio. "We were performing the album live," he explains, "So in the music [you] can hear how we poured our hearts into the songs." The setting is one they're at home with. "We [grew] up going to church, listening to our grandfathers singing *shiyameni* [Zulu dance] songs and *isicathamiya* [Zulu a capella singing]."

As well as beautifully worked traditionals drawn from this background, *The Joy* features original compositions. These are so rich in harmony, melody and the rhythms of Zulu song that one has to check the liner notes to be sure which is which. "When we write songs," Duzie reflects, "I guess it just happens that we go back to our roots and take melodies of those different genres and put them together." As for content, "it's pretty easy, because we write about some things that are happening in our life and in our community." I ask about 'Amaqatha Amancane', the bursting single in which Duzie's pure voice cuts clear in front of deep bass and doo-wop backing; the track's midway shift to a higher key is sublime. "That one wasn't something we were writing seriously," Duzie laughs, "We were just chilling [and] one of the guys was chopping small pieces of meat. We decided to freestyle and sing about how he is chopping [small pieces for everyone] as if the meat was bought by him." Another highlight, 'Ubaba Uthwelekanzima', is deeper in register and more drawn out. Every now and then though, the voices reach higher, sending shivers. It sounds like the paean it is. "The song is talking about the struggle of being a father," Duzie considers, "having to be a provider for the family, but then the job opportunities are scarce… We can all relate to the song." [This last assertion shouldn't surprise, with more than half of eThekwini's population living below the upper-bound poverty line.]

Duzie's favourite, though, is 'Bayang'khethela'. With a grin, he shakes his head before explaining: "The song is talking about your parents choosing a girlfriend for you. Last year I had this girlfriend [and] I'm not sure [how], because my grandmother had never met her, but she didn't like her, so she chose a different girl for me." When asked who won in the end, Duzie chuckles and tells me, "The heart always wins." Sthombe's favourite is something quite different, perhaps closer in concept to the group's roots: 'Jesu', a prayer. "We are begging God to protect [us] all the time," he says.

The Joy's faith, friendships and trust in each other, are themes that come up repeatedly. When asked how they stay grounded and keep the dynamic between all five of them positive, Duzie brings those themes together, "We have days where we just go to meet, talk. And then on different days, like before performance, we make sure that we don't go on stage without praying."

Their shows are noteworthy. Where a lot of a capella groups can slip live, The Joy never seem to. I ask about their smooth performance on a sunny day in Glastonbury last year. "This was quite an experience for us," Duzie says, surprising me, "because it was our first time singing with the [earpiece]. It was difficult because during the performance the earpiece [sometimes] cut, and we couldn't hear anything but we continued singing." This is made even more remarkable when Duzie notes that the group's harmonies are "different every single time we perform." During that performance they sang 'Isencane Lengane', the very first single. They were clearly adults now, in bright colourful suits, and *au fait* with their surroundings on an astroturfed stage in the UK. But the focus, warmth and pride in their sound – as well as the smiles, dancing and improvised punctuation – perfectly matched those captured in the Natal fields and bare classrooms of the original video. ◆

*+ **The Joy** is a Top of the World this issue, see p44; 'Amaqatha Amancane' is on our Top of the World compilation, track 1*

# DAKAR FUTURE

**Def Mama Def** are a new West African duo lighting up the region with their hybrid of traditional and modern sounds. "We will introduce you to the new Senegalese musical era," they tell

***Megan Iacobini de Fazio***

"Ring the bell, another sound is coming," says Defa, one half of Senegalese duo Def Mama Def. "That's what *Oh Maliko* stands for, and it defines us perfectly. Be ready, we're turning a new page!" agrees Mamy Victory. The two singers are talking about their latest EP, *Oh Maliko*, and how the development of their urban Pan-African sound. "We met by chance through a mutual friend in 2017," recalls Defa "and since then we haven't separated. Musically, I think this connection is God's plan." Although as a duo Def Mama Def are relative newcomers to Dakar's vibrant music scene, they've separately been in the centre of it all for several years. Mamy Victory is known for her powerhouse vocals and fierce rapping that often deals with gender equality and female leadership, while Defa is one of the most sought-after R&B voices in Senegal and a backing singer for several of the country's biggest bands, including the legendary Daara J Family.

Together, they draw on the rich sounds of Dakar's nightlife, from *mbalax* — the popular style that emerged in the 1970s and blends Wolof traditional rhythms and praise songs with Latin, jazz and pop influences — to hip-hop and reggae. "We draw a lot of inspiration from the music of home, first," says Defa, "You can hear the *sabar*, which comes from Senegal. We like to call our music 'tam tam piano' [portmanteau of Senegalese *tam-tam* drum and *amapiano*]. Musically, we are very open."

Though their sound is rooted in Senegalese popular music, Def Mama Def incorporate various African genres into their music, from Afrobeats to South African amapiano: "We tell the musical history of our continent through contemporary sounds," says Defa. Starting with her incredible high-pitched voice, resounding like a clarion call to announce their arrival, 'Jigeen', the opening track on *Oh Maliko*, epitomises their kaleidoscopic style, combining amapiano's bright synths and shakers with jazzy horns and Wolof percussion. On the title-track, Defa's soulful vocals collide with Mamy Victory's bold flow, delivering a dancehall-infused explosion that hits hard.

"We grew up with this mix of urban and traditional music. In Senegal it's normal, and it works," proclaims Mamy Victory. The eclectic mix of sounds that has always characterised Senegal's music scene is celebrated every year at Dakar Music Expo, which brings together artists and music professionals from West Africa and beyond for four days of concerts, panels and events. Def Mama Def's fiery performance there in 2022 led to a European tour and gigs across Africa: "Dakar Music Expo really helps with pushing new artists and discovering new talents, but in Dakar there are still few spaces for urban musicians to perform. And with the recent political problems we haven't been able to perform, but we hope that in 2024 that will change," Defa confides.

> "We grew up with this mix of urban and traditional music. In Senegal it's normal"

This summer Def Mama Def are scheduled to perform several dates across the UK, including at Liverpool's Africa Oyé and Green Island Festival in Manchester. "We will be on stage with our drummer, Sym Sam, and our beatmaker, Baay Sooley," says Mamy Victory. "We will introduce you to the Senegalese musical universe, the new Senegalese musical era," she continues. "We are ready to conquer the world and share the love and the energy that we give everywhere. We have arrived." ◆

+ *'Limu Laaj' features on this issue's compilation, track 14*

# PAN AFRICAN **ROCKSTAR**

With Afrobeats and African pop on the rise, **Lady Donli** has emerged as one of Nigeria's most interesting artists. At home with Afrobeat and satirising modern African life with smooth R&B hooks, she's led by her fans: "People are the foundation of music," she tells ***Erin Cobby***

Lady Donli is done with being put in a box. "I just love music," she replies when I ask how she defines hers. "I love how it can take on different forms and live in different places." A star known for blending R&B, Afrobeats, highlife and jazz, she's never been willing to stay in one lane.

This approach to styling can be traced back to the music Donli was exposed to as a child watching Channel O and MTV. "It helped that I was the youngest," she laughs. "My brother would come home from school and just want to watch music videos. I wanted to watch cartoons, but hey, we only had one remote."

Before long, Donli was in the studio, and although it was to record a jingle for a noodles ad, it sparked a life-long love of recording. After growing up experimenting with music and poetry, Donli finished university in the UK and returned to Lagos with a renewed passion to release. Her mixtape *Love or War* came out in 2014 and was followed by her debut album *Enjoy Your Life* in 2019.

"I feel like *Enjoy Your Life* was really a moment in Nigerian culture," she says. "We had reached a point of regression and all the music coming out was being viewed through this Afropop lens. When I was growing up, we had artists creating their own energy… I wanted to revive that and show that there are so many more elements of music to tap into."

*Pan African Rockstar*, released last year, came next. Suffering from imposter syndrome, which Donli states is common among female musicians in Nigeria's hyper-masculine culture, she wanted to make a body of work that boosted feminine confidence. "That's why all the songs have the message of 'you're the number one motherfucker,'" she laughs.

> "All the songs have the message of 'you're the number one motherfucker'"

Donli doesn't want to stop there. She dreams of becoming the CEO of her own label. "We could have an industry which thrives on different dimensions, but people are so bent on what is popular right now. I want to nurture community-led artists who have people that still love them 20 years on," she explains.

Community building is something Donli has already incorporated into her own practice. Aware of the alienating price of tickets, she put on four free shows in Lagos last year. She also created a Discord channel to chat with fans, invited them on stage for birthday numbers and created merch so they could be recognisable to each other. "People are the foundation of music," she explains. "It's all about finding new ways to nurture that."

And although she hasn't got that CEO moniker just yet, Donli's already championing diverse talent. Tapping into the new wave of electronic music which is popular in the rave scene in Lagos, Donli reached out to the duo FäēM who had already remixed a few of her tracks for a project. "It's my way of spotlighting a scene and seeing what that does for them," she explains.

Not harbouring a passion for electronic music personally, Donli explains this move reflects a wider experimental approach she has to music and the different spaces it can reach. "We do this electronic project and then that lives on the dancefloor. Ultimately, that's what music is for me – the transmission of joy."

It's that joy that Donli recently brought to a tour of North America and a headline show at London's Jazz Cafe, and which she's embodied over her decade-long career. I ask her the biggest lesson she's learnt during this time. "That I don't know anything," she laughs. "And that's how you need to approach music. You need to be a student of the game forever. And enjoy being that student – being a master is overrated." ◆

+ *'Comme Ci Comme Ça (with The Lagos Panic)' is featured on this issue's compilation, track 15*

Rebecca Rowe

# AFROBEAT SHAKEDOWN

Frustrated by the state of popular African music, **Franck Biyong** decided to create his own 'Afrolectric' sound inspired by Le Grand Kallé, Fela Kuti, Manu Dibango and the greats of yesteryear. "I just want to tear down the barrier that separates African music from the mainstream," hears ***Daniel Brown***

Franck Biyong cuts an elegant figure both on- and off-stage. The tall, bespectacled Cameroonian could pass for the academic professor his parents always hoped he would become. Certainly, his aesthetic approach towards production, composition and guitar playing has a pedagogic side, allying explorations of his heritage with a prescient notion of what the musical future holds. Biyong contends that it was a brace of gigs at London's Jazz Cafe in 2001 with his band Massak that kickstarted his career: "the crowd literally went nuts. Those two gigs really put us on the map." Since then, Biyong has led us to the fault lines and bridges between the musics of sub-Saharan Africa and the West, giving birth to 20 category-defying albums along the way. Now, with *Radio Masoda*, the 50-year-old says there is a form of closure to the Afro-music library he's created, something between Afro-jazz and what he calls 'Afrolectric Rock.' It's a voyage I've tracked from a distance, ever since I heard his second album, *Haiti Market*. At the time, I described it as '*a sumptuous collage of Afrobeat, soul, funk and jazz by this little-known Franco-Cameroonian combo [destined] for greater things in the near future*.' Seventeen years later, the Nairobi-based artist has scaled several pinnacles before arriving at what he calls a crossroads: "This latest album was born just before the pandemic, not far from here," he tells me during a long exchange on a rainy day in central Paris. "I was discussing the different directions African music is going with scholars from Cameroon, Nigeria and Benin. The most popular sounds now are the new African electronic music everyone calls Afrobeats or *amapiano*. We were wondering if African music is doomed to

Osborne Macharia

be a permanent novelty because it continues to be linked to the reissues of music from the 1960s-80s. Or is there a modern way of expressing our music while making it more accessible and yet deeper than the enjoyment factor? So, I began composing around this notion, hoping to shake things up."

Part of this shake-up is Biyong's critique of how poorly African pioneers have been honoured for their works. "Since Fela disappeared, we haven't managed to create what reggae music created in terms of permanence. I wanted to pay homage to these giants before they fall off the radar." The result is eight tracks that take listeners on what Biyong describes as "a musical safari." It begins with a stop in 'Kabasele Kingdom' where he pays homage to Congolese rumba legend Le Grand Kallé: "We failed to revere this founding father of African music in the way Cubans revere Machito or the Arab world worships Oum Kalthoum," he admits drily. Then there is Tony Allen. Appropriately, the first notes Biyong recorded for *Radio Masoda* were by Afrobeat's consummate drummer. A shadow crosses his brow: "There was this major *Felabration* here in Paris in 2019 and all these former Africa 70 musicians were there. I will always remember how Tony seemed to act like it was a bit of a farewell. He was gracious and satisfied that there was a new generation willing to carry that Afrobeat sound further. Right after the concert, I asked Tony to record a drum solo in our studio, not really knowing what I would do with it. And then, five months later, he died." Silence. "Tony was the complete innovator, and he has yet to be recognised for his pioneering work. He innovated by pouring his *apala* Yoruba and Ghanaian Fanti roots into this new genre Fela Kuti was forging. Fela's former percussionist Chief Udoh Essiet and I basically built the song 'Oladipo' around that solo. It was important to pay homage to someone who had made such a giant contribution to African music, or modern music, full stop." In this album, Biyong also pays tribute to another giant who fell during the COVID-19 pandemic, Manu Dibango. "His early work has been all too easily forgotten. Manu recorded some fantastic records, like 1982's *Waka Juju* and *Countdown at Kusini* in 1975, which was one of the standout Blaxploitation records. Yet, young people have a hard time identifying with him because his music is complex, with a lot of changes in harmonies and little room for improvisation. It was a bit further away from African elements which float around here and there."

> "Tony [Allen] was the complete innovator and he has yet to be recognised for his pioneering work"

Like Dibango's early works, musical genres in *Radio Masoda* cascade from one song to the next, sometimes in the same song: from rumba to Afrobeat, from *jùjú* to highlife and *soukous*. And always with the undertow of Biyong's trademark Afrolectric groove. "I'm hoping listeners' ears are inspired to keep on listening as rhythms, harmonies and moods change." Biyong is faithful, too, to the experimental nature which characterises his long career. Take 'Lipanda', led by the Lingala singing of French vocalist Mary May alongside Biyong's Nigerian Pidgin vocals and a soukous guitar solo played in an unusual minor mode. This fuses with jazz-rock bass and a funky horn section, giving the song an Afrobeat feel that's both danceable and destabilising. "I just want to tear down the barrier that separates African music from the mainstream," affirms the soft-spoken artist. "I think that the best way African music can progress is by working in a musical context where you don't really expect an African musician." Biyong evokes Keziah Jones, an old-time friend who crashed genres with his 1992 song 'Rhythm is Love': "No one expected this groove feel, a vibe quite different from pop, funk, soul and rock – and a bit of all of those, but unique in so many ways."

Keziah might just be part of Biyong's future now that *Radio Masoda* is closing a chapter. They're even toying with the idea of setting up a 'supergroup' around their electric guitars. But, for the moment, the multi-instrumentalist prefers to focus on the new possibilities offered by his eight-piece band Afrobrainz. They have been setting the Nairobi scene alight with their brand of Afro-electric funk-rock, drawing from a metropolis which has seen an exponential rise in musical talents recently: "There's something very special happening in East Africa just now," says Biyong, with conviction. "Nairobi is seeing a new fusion of genres, with a major input from exiled Congolese musicians. We're trying to grow an alternative to the African Nigerian sound led by Burna Boy. We've been pushing this new style partly thanks to Afro-soul singing in Kiswahili. This is an incredible language, very melodic, with a musical flow that can be understood from Rwanda and Tanzania to Kenya and right down to the Comoros." For the first time, Biyong will be bringing Afrobrainz to Europe as the headliner for the Tropical Pressure festival in July: "It'll be great to test our electronic repertoire there. If all goes well, Tangential Records and I hope to bring out a live album, and follow it up with a studio production."

Franck Biyong's thirst to produce and share remains unquenched despite a punishing output these past two decades. Behind the calm demeanour and soothingly deep voice, he retains the restless desire to leave a mark: "I think people like myself – who were lucky to have a musical education that forged complex technical abilities and unbelievable space to innovate – have something of a responsibility to the younger generations to guide them to the next phase of African music. For a time, I want to share that centre stage with them. I want to create a unit which takes us away from music based on individual brilliance and towards the more collective approach we used to have in the 1970s. Then, perhaps, I can take a step back and enjoy the new threshold from the sidelines." ◆

**+ *Radio Masoda*** *is reviewed p44. 'Oladipo (feat Chief Udoh Essiet, Tony Allen)' features on this issue's compilation, track 13*

# THE BANJO SUMMIT

The banjo is riding high once more, and with various accusations of cultural appropriation in the air, we decided the time was right for a debate with two of the best banjo players out there, **Rhiannon Giddens** and **Béla Fleck**

INTERVIEW BY RUSS SLATER JOHNSON

SONGLINES.CO.UK

In February this year Beyoncé released 'Texas Hold 'Em', a single previewing her forthcoming *Cowboy Carter* album which embraced country music and the role of Black Americans in the genre. The banjo riff that begins 'Texas Hold 'Em' was played by Rhiannon Giddens, an artist who has done more than most to reinstate the importance of Black Americans in US folk music traditions. The success of *Cowboy Carter*, which made Beyoncé the first Black woman to top the US country album charts, had many accusing her of cultural appropriation. Meanwhile, the same accusation was also being fired at George Gershwin, whose 'Rhapsody in Blue' turned 100 in February and still faces criticism for its appropriation of African-American jazz. To mark the anniversary, Béla Fleck released *Rhapsody in Blue*, an album inspired by the Gershwin classic, and in tandem wrote an op-ed for WBGO (US public radio) to address the continued criticism of Gershwin.

With the banjo riding high in the charts again, and conversations about cultural ownership and appropriation still raging, it feels like the perfect time for a banjo summit featuring two of the instrument's foremost players. "I think it's really funny for your banjo summit that you have one who knows how to play all the notes and one who knows how to play like four notes," says Giddens, Fleck interrupting nonchalantly with "Which one is who, though?" "You're funny," Giddens smirks, "I play my four notes, and I play them well, but I think it shows you how flexible the banjo is and how amazing it is as an instrument." Fleck carries on the thought: "It also points out that quality of music is not about how complicated it is, and who can get in more notes. It goes back to who's playing it, where's it coming from, what are they trying to achieve, is it their truth?"

> "I don't want to be portrayed as a northener who is looking down on hillbilly music"

***To begin, I wanted to ask about your initial reference points for the banjo.***

**Rhiannon**: [Mine] were like what a lot of people's reference points would have been, i.e., bluegrass, *Beverly Hillbillies*... My uncle was in a bluegrass band. Where it shifted for me was in my 20s when I was contra dancing, and a lot of the bands for the contra dances in North Carolina were old-time bands. It would have been round-peak style, primarily, old clawhammer banjo, heavily syncopated and just, you know, really funky, which is what I loved about it. And so I took some lessons and did some workshops. I learned a bit from Cathy Fink and a bit here and there. And then when I met Joe [Thompson, mentor for the Carolina Chocolate Drops], I was still pretty much a beginning banjo player. He was a fiddler but I listened to recordings of his brother and his cousin, and my banjo playing is completely informed by playing with him.

**Béla:** I heard Earl Scruggs playing on the *Beverly Hillbillies* television show, and I thought it was the most incredible thing I'd ever heard. I was somewhere between five and seven, we went to my grandparents' house, and they stuck us in the bedroom and let us watch TV. And on came this show, and this sound just struck me. My brother, who's a year older than me, was sitting with me and after the introduction to the show I said, 'did you hear that? Can you believe that?' And he said, 'what?' It had no impact on him at all. From then on, I was banjo aware, but I wasn't connected to the tradition. This was up in New York City, in Queens, where I'd heard this sound. Whenever the banjo would show up I would get excited, but I never thought I would be able to play it because it sounded impossible for anybody to play. So I started learning to play guitar and I was kind of a half-assed guitar player. And then 'Dueling Banjos' hit and it became this huge, enormous worldwide hit, and banjo became a lot more mainstream for a while. And so my grandfather saw a banjo at a flea market and bought it, and when I went to visit him, the day before I started high school, there was this banjo sitting there in his house. He said, 'I thought you might like this.' All of a sudden it was in my lap and I just couldn't put it down. I just picked it up and I changed from a type-B guitar player who liked the idea of being a musician, to when the banjo came into my hands, I became obsessive. It was like an alien bug bite.

***In Songlines [#94] Béla, you say that the banjo was very popular throughout the 1800s, then its popularity began petering out in the 1930s. But, by the 40s, with Bill Monroe and Earl Scruggs it makes a comeback...***

**Rhiannon:** For me, [this is when] the banjo shifts. The banjo was a very, very popular instrument and it was used for a lot of different things. And it's really during the segregation of American music at the beginning of the recording industry that a lot of things start shifting, and also technology changes, so the banjo stops becoming popular in places like jazz, because the electrified guitar takes over. Or in other genres, it kind of falls out of favour, as things do. I think its resurgence in the 40s and 50s is part of a careful narrative and a restructuring of American history through this idea of hillbillyism which is coming out of what's going on in the late 20s and early 30s when the recording industry starts. It becomes part of that and it gets divorced from its Black origins in the mainstream.

**Béla:** Well, I always have to be careful about that part of it because I'm very aware of the Black origins of the banjo. And I think it's a beautiful part. You know, that's why the thing is so great. But [hits] like ['Duelling Banjos'] cemented exactly what you're talking about, the white southern part of the banjo. The banjo is so much more than that, but I also have to give it up to the musicianship of some of these people that are the reason that woke me up and hooked me about it. In other words, I have to be careful to not put down Earl Scruggs because without Earl Scruggs I wouldn't be so connected.

**Rhiannon:** You're not putting down Earl Scruggs.

**Béla:** No, I'm not. I always have to be very careful... I don't want to be portrayed as a northerner who is looking down on hillbilly music because there's so much that's great about that too. The hard part is that there's so much other great music that didn't get the same opportunities.

**Rhiannon:** Absolutely.

***Were Black Americans complicit in turning away from the banjo, especially when genres like jazz became popular?***

**Rhiannon:** There's always a question of, 'why did Black people put the banjo down?' In later generations, there's a desire not to go back to the banjo because of minstrelsy. But I don't think ▸

Rhiannon Giddens and Béla Fleck in Nashville while recording an episode for Giddens' ten-part series for Wondrium, *The Banjo: Music, History and Heritage* (2023)

Amanda Kowalski; Philip Ryalls

that that was the driving concern of professional musicians who were going, 'oh, this guitar now is electrified, I'm going to learn how to play this guitar' or 'the banjo is a little outmoded' or 'it's just what my grandfather played', or whatever. There's all of these things happening all at the same time, as well as, you know, leaving the South, wanting to leave negative imagery behind, but a lot of that is actively happening in the 20s with this sort of re-imagining of what American history is, whereas like 30 years before everybody would have known the banjo had Black roots, you know what I mean? There's mythology that's being actively written at this time that's changing people's perception. And you think about all the professional musicians who get caught up in this, you know, all those quote-unquote hillbilly musicians who showed up in their Sunday best and were told to go put on overalls, you know what I mean?

**Béla:** I had a great conversation with a banjo player named Danny Barker. He played with Louis Armstrong and others of that time. [The Flecktones] were in New Orleans and we called him up and had a long conversation about how the banjo died in jazz, because he was there. He said that in the early 30s, he had moved to New York and was playing banjo, and there was a recording that came out that kind of captured everybody's fancy, and it featured a guitar instead of banjo. And he said almost instantly, banjo was dead, every banjo player was out of work, and that's when they started playing those tenor guitars which was an instrument basically for banjo players. And, as Rhiannon said, the reason is because of the minstrelsy. Because if you've got white folks painting themselves black, singing about how great slavery was on the plantation, that's pretty revolting. So, he switched over to guitar and he didn't play banjo for many years.

**Rhiannon:** ... [But] not everybody's experience of that was the same. It is tempting to say that [minstrelsy] is *the* reason why Blacks put the banjo down, and it's not, it's *one* of the reasons...

***Are things better or worse now, in terms of inclusivity? We still have artists like Beyoncé not being accepted into country music, but then folk festivals are more inclusive...***

**Béla:** You're looking for a simple answer and it doesn't really work that way. There are good signs and there are bad signs. There's the folk festival that's overrun by acts that aren't folk music at all. You have that problem in jazz as well, where the word jazz becomes a brand. But in terms of the banjo's perception, I think a lot more people are getting it, largely because of Rhiannon and her efforts and the people she's helped bring to people's attention. And then people use banjo for false authenticity. It used to be that the banjo was the kiss of death because nobody wanted to hear it. But, at a certain point, it started making its way back into music. Like Keith Urban having banjo all over his records, or the Avett Brothers or this Americana world. People could put a banjo into a song and it would make the song seem more earthy and more meaningful. But it really didn't have a connection to banjo.

**Rhiannon:** I just want to speak to the documentary [*Throw Down Your Heart*] that Béla did, you know, connecting the banjo to its Afro-ancestors, which is for a lot of people their first knowledge about the banjo being a Black instrument. So, there's a lot of us doing this work, and it takes this kind of village to reach our people in certain ways. In terms of perceptions, we have to look at the banjo as an instrument which became commercial in the 1850s. Before the 1850s, it would have been homemade, ceremonial, then it becomes a commercial mainstream instrument from minstrelsy in the 1850s and then everybody starts playing this banjo: Black, white, brown, whatever, because it's a great banjo. I have one. It's fantastic. After this, you have these banjo companies making banjos for everything that [is] completely divorced from where the banjo came from. You've got banjo ukes, baritone banjos, cello banjos, bass banjos, soprano banjos. And then you've got traditional banjo playing, in the mountains, in the Piedmont... You've got banjo playing that's connected to this folk music, and then commercial music, there's always been this back and forth. So, when you're looking at what is a folk festival, that gets hairy because who's deciding what folk music is? Is it based on the 60s idea of what folk music is, i.e. Pete Seeger? Or is it based on the White Top Mountain Festival, i.e. no Black people exist? I see a resurgence and a lot of interest in traditional ways of playing the banjo from young people, whether it's bluegrass, old-time, minstrel, stroke-style banjo. [But] I still got a question about *Deliverance* in the first minute of my *Daily Show* interview. Literally I was like, 'Are we really still here?' But I feel hopeful because of the resurgence of people interested in traditional and folk music, people are realising that it's tied to something real, and that's what they're looking for, they're looking for real.

**Béla:** I was just thinking about how when I was a kid and I started playing banjo, I'd walk down the street and people would go, 'yee-haw, squeal like a pig,' and I found it so offensive, I was like, this is a serious instrument. I love this instrument. But I did notice that by the 90s, I guess *Deliverance* was old enough that it wasn't part of modern culture, I mean, the older folks would still do that, but the young kids... I'd play a college and they'd come over and ask me about the banjo. They could tell this was something rooted and old and special, and they were interested.

Above: Carolina Chocolate Drops (L-R): Rhiannon Giddens, Dom Flemons, Joe Thompson and Justin Robinson; Below: Giddens at Cambridge Folk Festival in 2015

> “The banjo [was] the first American cultural export… It *is* America”

Left: Bassekou Kouyate and Béla Fleck swap instruments in Fleck’s *Throw Down Your Heart*; Right: Fleck rehearsing circa 2014

***We must mention ‘Texas Hold ’Em’… In 2019, Rhiannon, you said: ‘The only way to be Black is to be like Beyoncé, bullshit!’***

**Rhiannon:** Beyoncé is in an unenviable position of being representative for a lot of things. So she’s a shorthand. What I was saying there, which I stand by to this day, because it has nothing to do with Beyoncé and everything to do with perceptions of Blackness… To the mainstream Black media, it felt to me that my rooted ways of being Black, i.e. playing the banjo, which predates anything else, you know, were not perceived as being Black. And that was frustrating. I was like, we’re cutting off a whole limb because we think that’s the only way. Fast forward a year and I said also the only way to get the banjo in Black hands in a way larger than what I can do is if Beyoncé puts banjo on the track. I’ve been very clear in knowing the cultural power that she holds… So fast forward to ‘Texas Hold ’Em’ and I signed an NDA and I can’t talk about it. So…

***But this is important, to have a banjo on such a big album…***

**Rhiannon:** I won’t say anything about that specifically, but my sound is very specific. It’s a replica 1858 banjo. That sound is in *Red Dead Redemption 2* [a video game Giddens provided music for]. I’ve snuck it in lots of different places, because it harkens back to an ancestral sound that is not associated with the banjo because of the technological innovation that changed it so that it could more ably play European styles of music. The banjo that I play is much more connected to the previous set of ancestral instruments that came before it. And so it would have been a skin head, gut strings, fretless and made out of wood. When people hear it, they go, ‘what the fuck is that?’ It’s trying to nuance the conversation.

**Béla:** I agree. It’s very different from the Earl Scruggs experience. It has an equally powerful sound; I hear it and I go, ‘yeah this is more connected to the musicians I played with in Africa playing *ngonis* and *akontings* and things like that.’

***Béla, let’s talk about your recent album, Rhapsody in Blue. You wrote an op-ed defending Gershwin…***

**Béla:** Life is complicated, nuanced, but as soon as you put up walls between creative impulses, I think you’re shooting yourself in the foot, so that was my main concern. Maybe I’m protective of white people that are blown away by music that’s not white and it changed their music, and then being wrong for that. I don’t think there’s anything wrong with that. For instance, Charlie Parker and Coltrane loved Western classical music and took a lot of things out of that and it inspired them and when they played their jazz, it had more influences in it, and I think that’s all natural and beautiful. The problem is when you don’t reveal your sources and make believe you invented this stuff from another culture. That’s when it gets inappropriate for me. But to hear something incredible that blows you away and moves you and makes you want to create, that shouldn’t be stopped. ‘Rhapsody in Blue’ did that for me, when I was a kid.

**Rhiannon:** Whiteness is a construct as much as Blackness, and that’s part of the problem in our culture… We can hold multiple things at once. I’ve been in *Porgy and Bess*. I acknowledge there’s issues with that piece, while also saying there’s something that he captured through his own religiosity that connects to Black religiosity. We too often look for the simple answer.

***Final question. What more can the banjo achieve?***

**Béla:** I don’t want to insult anybody, but the banjo is the cockroach of musical instruments, it can’t be stamped out. It keeps on coming back and people keep finding a way to use it, so I think, just allow it to continue to do that. I don’t think any of us are in control of it anyway, but the more we do stuff that we feel good about putting out there, the more that gives people music that might inspire them. But I like the person that finds a banjo that has never heard banjo and writes something, comes up with a way to play it and it’s divorced from the traditions as well.

**Rhiannon:** I think one of the reasons why the banjo keeps fascinating people is because it is the quintessential American instrument. It is created in the Caribbean by people of African descent and becomes American when it moves up into the United States. The banjo [was] the first American cultural export. It’s the foundation of our culture. When you think about Kristina Gaddy’s book, *Well of Souls,* [it shows how] the banjo was an instrument of resistance, of connection, of ceremony, of community. It’s history cannot be forgotten, and it needs to be connected to what the banjo is now. It *is* America, with all of its warts and with all of its amazing beautifulness, right? ◆

# Run!

Every Mardi Gras, a blur of costumed Cajun and Creole revellers in Louisiana head off in search of gumbo ingredients. When an ingredient is offered, such as a live chicken, the race is on. David Simpson has been documenting this unique tradition for over 25 years, with a new book capturing the centuries-old celebrations

**Photos by David Simpson**

“In 1997 on Mardi Gras day, I happened to be jogging about 9am near my home when I encountered the *courir* [French for ‘to run’] on its way out of town. A few of the Mardi Gras [participants in a courir are referred to as ‘Mardi Gras’] made fun of me. I can’t recall any details, but I thought one jibe was pretty clever. When I got back home, I grabbed my camera and hurried to catch up with the courir. Once I had encountered the brightly costumed Mardi Gras dancing, begging, cutting up and really letting loose, heard the medieval sounding strains of ‘La Chanson de Mardi Gras’ played by musicians riding in a wagon, and watched my first chicken chase, I was hooked.”

So recalls David Simpson of his entry into the Mardi Gras traditions of Acadiana, the southern region of Louisiana known as Cajun Country. Simpson grew up in Baton Rouge but moved to Eunice in Acadiana to work as an English teacher. As a side project at work he

*Courir* by David Simpson

began documenting the local culture on a university web page. Witnessing his first courir in 1996, by 1997 he was engrossed. His photograph book documenting the event, *Courir*, contains images taken between 1999 and 2023.

Describing the tradition within its pages, he writes: *'The courir are led by a capitaine who, when they arrive at a farm house or other pre-arranged stop, obtains permission to enter private property, after which the Mardi Gras charge toward the front of the house, where they sing, dance and beg until the owner provides them with an ingredient for a gumbo [which] is offered to the Mardi Gras at the end of the run. Frequently, homeowners throw a live chicken in the air for the Mardi Gras to chase, converging together like football players competing to try to recover a fumble. The Mardi Gras wear costumes that conceal their identities and that also follow a very old tradition of mocking the roles of those in authority.'*

## COURIR DE MARDI GRAS

***+ Courir** is published by FLEE Project*

# Reviews

We review full-length world music, roots and folk albums (not singles or EPs), available on CD, digital or vinyl.
Please note we only accept digital submissions. Email details of albums to reviews@songlines.co.uk for consideration


Africa *44*
Americas *48*
Europe *54*
Middle East *60*
Asia & Pacific *61*
Fusion *64*


The *Songlines Top of the World* compilation, featuring tracks from our favourite albums each issue, can be downloaded by visiting https://linktr.ee/SL199

## AC BC Project
CultureRize: Bamako All Stars Vol I

Roadmusic Productions

★★★☆☆

All-star projects can often end up with curate's egg on their tracklists. The Bamako-based collective with the cumbersome name are mixed and mastered by Charles Auguste Coulibaly and Marco Romano, aka MC Spacewalk, whose vocals feature on two of the 11 tracks celebrating Mali's rich musical heritage and the communicatory power of rhythm. Traditional and contemporary instruments are augmented by a range of guest vocalists, including the late Zoumana Tereta and Miss Maawa. The former is heard on the standout 'Ma Bien Aimée', in which Tereta's magnificent guttural vocal and the underlying instrumental drone refuse to waver in the face of a snarling, sniping electric guitar. On the latter's impressive main feature, 'Imakou Ye Ndie (Don't Cry)', her vocal would give Fatoumata Diawara a run for her money. The other featured vocalists are very much representative of the contemporary Malian music scene: Adama Kouyaté is heard on the delicious 'Kanimba Yeke Yeke', seemingly a transmutation of Mory Kanté's mega hit, while Kerfala Kante Jr's feature 'Mobaden' could almost be taken from (his former boss) Salif Keita's *Amen*. Even if a couple of cuts don't quite hit the mark, as curate's eggs go, this is a tasty one.

*MARK SAMPSON*

TRACK TO TRY *Ma Bien Aimée (feat Zoumana Tereta)*

TOP OF THE WORLD
TRACK 1

## The Joy
The Joy

Transgressive Records

★★★★★

Yes, it's a lazy quip, but what a joy this is. Six years ago, when these five young men from the South African township of Hammarsdale turned up early to their school choir practice and started jamming together, it must have seemed inconceivable that one day Alicia Keys would be a fan, Jennifer Hudson would call them her '*favourite South African group*,' their a cappella songs would garner millions of streams and they would make this eponymous album of 11 raw, spine-tingling songs in a famous North London church recording studio. But make it they did: in real time with no overdubs and no wizardry – in the spirit of their Zulu musical heritage and also the street-corner groups of the doo-wop era. Listening to their harmonies, it's hard not to think of Ladysmith Black Mambazo, on whose music the members of The Joy grew up. Marcus (Sanele Ngcobo) sings lead on 'Ngiphuphe', otherwise the thrilling and deeply affecting lead voice is Duzie's (Melokuhle Mkhungo). In conjunction with four-part harmonies, the richness of numbers like 'Amandla ka Moya' can be almost overpowering. As for the penultimate 'Jesu', it could wash, rinse and wring even the starchiest sinner. This exceptional album is the very soul of simplicity.

*MARK SAMPSON*

TRACK TO TRY *uBaba Uthwelekanzima*

## Syna Awel
Awel

Imago Records

★★☆☆☆

Syna Awel comes from the Kabylia region of Algeria, and is one of the singers in Ifriqiyya Electrique, although this smoothed-out debut album is another proposition entirely. Awel opts for a mellow, French-ified direction, although still mostly singing in Berber. Pierre Bonnet provides pliable electric bass, David Aubaile plays piano/flute and bandleader Karim Ziad and a guesting Rabah Khalfa are presumably responsible for the *bendir*, *krakeb* and *darbuka* percussion. There are some pleasing peripheral touches, such as the group chant vocals, underneath Awel's slightly vibrato vocalisations. She recalls the approach of the Ethiopian singer Aster Aweke. 'Yemma Gouraya' has more thrust, with a grainy flute solo, fluid bass and a percussion break, speeding up for its close. 'Hader Iman-ik' even has a salsa-shaded piano figure. There are some appealing trimmings, but this album's core is too pop orientated.

*MARTIN LONGLEY*

TRACK TO TRY *Yemma Gouraya*

## Franck Biyong
Radio Masoda

Tangential Music

★★★★☆

On this, his latest of 20 albums, the Paris-based guitarist and composer adds to his native Cameroonian music generous pinches of *makossa*, Afrobeat, Ghanaian highlife and Congolese rumba and *soukous* to create – with the help of guests such as Tony Allen and fellow Parisian, vocalist Sandre Nkaké – something joyful and, as Biyong suggests, "a tribute to the... golden age of African music." Several tracks resonate with the spirit of his mentor, Manu Dibango: the glorious opener, 'Kabasele Kingdom', with its ringing guitars and riffing horns courtesy of

Pat Thomas' Kwashibu Area Band; 'Mbopi Road', sung by Mozambican Helio Vanimal, who sounds a dead ringer for the 'Lion of Africa'; and the exuberant up-tempo 'Elephant Rumble', which would've been a great follow-up to Dibango's 'Big Blow'. Tony Allen guests on 'Oladipo (feat Chief Udoh Essiet)"s blend of soukous, highlife, Afrobeat and all things nice and funky. Franco's 'Liwa Ya Wech' has been transformed from early Congolese rumba into something more sad and stately that echoes faintly Hugh Masekela's immortal 'Stimela'. 'Lipanda (feat Mary May)', with its apparent quote from Fela Kuti's 'Lady', would put a smile on anyone's face. Tune into *Radio Masoda* forthwith! It's chock-full of variety and beautifully done.

*MARK SAMPSON*

TRACK TO TRY *Lipanda (feat Mary May)*

## Duo Landry+
Men Lŏnu

Duo Landry+

★★★☆☆

Duo Landry+ formed in 2016 after an encounter at the Institut Français de Cotonou. Together, clarinettist, flautist and saxophonist Landry Padonou and guitarist and singer Landry Magnidet Dannon create a sound deeply rooted in Beninese culture, with songs uniting Fongbé and French discussing various social themes. The duo regularly travel the country visiting schools, cultural associations, and, of course, touring. This is their second album, arriving five years after their debut *Aflimi*. I particularly enjoyed 'Sési', sung in Fongbé and full of warm, full choral interjections, as well as improvised clarinet lines from Landry Padonou. The next track 'Sín Gbè Xuenu' expands on this choral theme, with the choir more present, backed only with light percussion and steel-string acoustic guitar. The ordering of the tracks on this album is very intelligent, with each song expanding on the ideas of the previous. Some listeners might find the folk/country music influences difficult, it tends to be a very 'love or hate' sonority, but I found that after a few tracks I settled in, definitely some gems to be found in this album.

*CHARLOTTE ALGAR*

TRACK TO TRY *Sési*

## Zoë Modiga
nomthandazo

Yelloewax / BandaBanda

★★★★☆

Mike Skelton

Zoë Modiga became a star in South Africa, her birthplace, after appearing on that country's version of *The Voice*. She's since released two wildly imaginative studio albums that variously channel her diverse range and commitment to exploring issues around race, identity and female empowerment; 2020's *INGANEKWANE* got her the cover of *Songlines*. But where that album had a raw edge that suited her jazz performance-trained voice, *nomthandazo* feels polished to a sheen, its 18 (count 'em!) largely isiZulu-language tracks themed as a tribute to both of her grandmothers (one of whom, Nomthandazo, has a name translating to 'Mother of Prayer'), as well as the significance of maternal figures: '*Matriachy… allows us to catch glimpses of heaven, an expression of God themself*,' writes Modiga. There's no question that Modiga can write songs with hooks and texture. Or that she can sing. Her voice is world class: the harmony-flecked 'get lifted', a celebration of spirituality, feels like mainstream gospel. 'mzukulu', a sparkling guitar-led ode to her ancestral lineage, finds her words perfectly placed. There are strings, horns and breakbeats, ballads and pop anthems. Love, gratitude and the Creator's gifts are recurrent topics; this accomplished work holds no truck with cynicism. Even when it gets a little too sweet, Modiga keeps it real.

*JANE CORNWELL*

TRACK TO TRY *mokete*

TOP OF THE WORLD
TRACK 6

## Ballaké Sissoko & Derek Gripper
Ballaké Sissoko & Derek Gripper

Matsuli Music / Platoon

★★★★★

In terms of guitar and *kora* duos, it's hard to think much beyond the inspired collaboration of Toumani Diabaté and Ali Farka Touré on 2005's *In the Heart of the Moon*. The stringed dialogue here between the South African guitarist Derek Gripper and kora maestro Ballaké Sissoko is something special, though. Gripper found his way onto *Songlines*' radar with his extraordinary 2012 album *One Night on Earth* on which he transposed classical kora music for six-stringed acoustic guitar, a task most imagined to be impossible. That record included a composition by Sissoko and so when they met for a series of London concerts last year and recorded this collection of improvisations, it seemed like coming full circle. Since recording *One Night on Earth*, Gripper's mastery of the ancient music of the *jelis* and *griots* has grown ever more profound, opening up nothing less than a new direction in modern western guitar music. The seven instrumentals here include three joint improvisations in the classical West African style and three more playful pieces based around compositions by Gripper. In truth, the provenance of the material barely matters, for what stands out is the intuitive dialogue between two master musicians creating a summit meeting of gilded virtuosity and beauty.

*NIGEL WILLIAMSON*

TRACK TO TRY *Basle*

## Dawda Jobarteh & Stefan Pasborg
Live in Turku

April Records

★★★★☆

Bliss it must have been to have attended the Finnish jazz festival where this live set was recorded featuring the Gambian *kora* virtuoso Dawda Jobarteh and the well-travelled Danish jazz drummer Stefan Pasborg. Jobarteh, who has lived in Denmark since 1999 and is an uncle to both Toumani Diabaté and Sona Jobarteh, is a longtime *Songlines* favourite, both for his traditional kora playing and his bold collaborations with Scandinavian jazzers, such as the Norwegian trumpet player Gunnar Halle. Here he plays electric kora through a bunch of effects pedals so that on tracks such as 'Folkman', 'Better Git It in Your Soul' and 'Go Daw' – all of which are furiously improvised psych-rock 'ramalams' – you wouldn't even know it was a kora. On 'Togo' – which includes a crashing drum solo *à la* Ginger Baker – you can just about tell that Jobarteh is playing a traditional African stringed instrument but it is only on the gentler 'I Met Her by the River' and ▸

'Bamananyanke' that the Mandinka kora tradition is really evident. Purists will probably hate it – but for the rest of us the explosive sonic assault of Jobarteh and Pasborgs's Afro-futurism is nothing less than thrilling.

*NIGEL WILLIAMSON*

TRACK TO TRY *Folkman*

## Nduduzo Makhathini
uNomkhubulwane

Blue Note Records

★★★★★

Nduduzo Makhathini, the South African pianist, composer, healer and philosopher, offers his third Blue Note Records album, *uNomkhubulwane*. This remarkable album, a three-movement suite paying homage to the Zulu Goddess, uNomkhubulwane, while delving into Africa's poignant history of oppression, showcases Makhathini's trio alongside bassist Zwelakhe-Duma Bell le Pere and Cuban drummer,

Nduduzo Makhathini

Francisco Mela. Makhathini's musical journey, marked by his exploration of spirituality and ancestral traditions, reaches a zenith in *uNomkhubulwane*. Departing from conventional jazz motifs, he transcends into creative mysticism. Through three meticulously crafted movements, the pianist guides listeners on a transformative, meditative experience, offering a glimpse into the divine essence embodied by *uNomkhubulwane*. Each movement unfolds purposefully, addressing themes of collective memory, vitality and inner attainment, ultimately echoing Makhathini's message of optimism, freedom and balance for humanity. *uNomkhubulwane* invites listeners to embrace a new mode of humanism through the sacred songs of the goddess and African spirituality. 'Omnyama', the opening track, sets the tone of the project – with praises and summoning launched over hypnotic rhythm in acknowledgment of the divine and ancestral entities. The movements – 'Libations', 'Water Spirits' and 'Inner Attainment' are distinctive, yet complement each other. 'Izibingelelo', the first track of 'Inner Attainment' means 'Salutations' in isiZulu, welcoming the listener into the project's last chapter, reminding us of the invitation towards hope and harmony that comes with the essence of being. A work worth savouring.

*HILLARY PALESA MORUSI*

TRACK TO TRY *Izibingelelo*

## Tarwa N-Tiniri
Akal

Atty Records

★★★☆☆

Tarwa N-Tiniri were born in Ouarzazate, Morocco's 'door of the desert' and *Akal* marks their second album. Its title translates as 'Land' in Tamazight and serves a poetic expedition into the roots of Moroccan Amazigh culture. This is a desert blues album at heart and despite the genre being (one might argue) overdone, *Akal* maintains a pleasant freshness that reflects the band's youth. Tarwa N-Tiniri are five friends – Hamid Ait Ahmed on lead guitar and vocals, Smail Ait Nacer on bass, Mustapha Ait Ba on vocals, Youssef Ait Nacer on percussion and El Mokhtar Ait Nacer

# SETTING *the* SCENE
Conversations about place, belonging and music

## NANCY VIEIRA

**Where are you based, and how long have you been there?**
I've been based in Portugal for 35 years. I live in a small city close to Lisbon, at Tagus' southern border, called Barreiro.

**Is it home?**
Cape Verde is my homeland. 35 years ago, my father was given a mission and came to work in Portugal. All the family moved and made home in Lisbon. I was a teenager. I followed my studies, went to university, met a young man, got married, had a beautiful daughter and stayed...

**How would you describe the current atmosphere where you live?**
My feeling about the music scene is very good. It's very open, multicultural. In Lisbon, you can find musicians from different countries, especially African, getting together with Portuguese musicians, not only from traditional *fado* but from other modern, sometimes experimental, sounds, all very interesting. I wish in society in general, that this would be the case as well. This is an important issue having migrated to Portugal. There is a strong network of radios in Portugal and many good world music festivals.

**How supportive are the local government/ authorities to music and musicians?**
During the pandemic, it came to light that the artistic sector needed more support all the way and resources all the way. There are organisations that support artists yes, I was supported by the Sociedade Portuguesa de Autores (Portuguese Society of Authors) who assisted with the making of my latest album *Gente* through Galileo MC and Uguru. I am very fortunate to have Uguru as a booking and career management agency in Portugal who help my career nationally and internationally on so many levels.

**Who are the local music heroes? Who does everyone look up to?**
It's not easy to say... Young people have their heroes. I don't know much about them, more than what I see in the news, publicity... If you ask me for a musical heroine of all time, I would say Amália Rodrigues. Rui Veloso is one of the first Portuguese artists I learned about, even when I was in Cape Verde. For decades, he [has been] one of the Portuguese artists that transverses different generations. He is known as 'The Father of Portuguese Rock'.

**Who are the local musicians that you're most excited about?**
*Fado* singer Camané; António Zambujo – and I'm so glad and proud that he came, so kindly, to record a duet with me on my new album (the song is called 'Fado Crioulo'); young Salvador Sobral, [who's] so open-minded and likes to visit other sounds from Latin America, jazz; Carminho.

**When you're not making music what do you do there?**
Portugal is a very beautiful country! It's where I have lived for 35 years and I'm still discovering pleasant new places, in the countryside or by the ocean, and also historical places. I visit when I can. I like cinema. I spend time with my parents, and I like being home also. I like the peace we can only find at home.

**Where do you go?**
In vacations and holidays, I spend some time in a small village close to Abrantes, Ribatejo. It's a nice place, close to Zêzere River, where you can swim and enjoy a beautiful and relaxing landscape.

**Is there anything else we should know about the place? What do you love or hate about it?**
I like it here. If I didn't, I wouldn't have stayed so long. I feel like [I'm] home in a certain way. We used to say that in Portugal, in Lisbon, we can find the 11th Cape Verdean island (my country is a ten-island archipelago). We have an important diaspora and a big part of it it's based here. We speak the same language, our cultures have a lot in common.

**Lastly, is there anywhere else you'd rather be?**
Cabo Verde, my country. I want to live, and maybe die, there.

Arthur Dlamini, Ivone Amaral

on rhythm guitar – and *Akal* was recorded in their hometown village of Hassi Labied. The album is suffused with the inherent charm of desert blues and is at risk of being too pleasant and familiar. There are shining moments of experimentation such as on 'Adu' which features Simon Walls and subtle *joiking* from Norwegian Sámi singer Elin Kåven or on the opener 'Aghbalu' (also featuring Thijs Borsten) which features some haunting piano and what sounds like muted throat-singing in the background. 'Adrar' starts off sounding almost like an Amazigh 'Hallelujah' before picking up into the signature desert blues lope. But it doesn't feel like these interesting ideas are really dug into with conviction (these are the first three tracks and the remaining ten more or less sound like any other desert blues album). Moroccan singer Nukad shows up on the penultimate track, 'Tenere', but it unfortunately quickly devolves into pop mushiness. *Akal* is a pleasant if not ground-breaking album, but one hopes Tarwa N-Tiniri will lean harder into the unique ideas of the first few tracks for the next release.

*ALEXANDRA PETROPOULOS*

TRACK TO TRY *Aghbalu (feat Thijs Borsten)*

## Nancy Vieira
Gente

Galileo Music Communication

★★★★½

Born in Bissau and raised in Cape Verde, Nancy Vieira, now based in Lisbon, is a leading exponent of Cape Verdean song and her new album, *Gente,* is a shining example of the blending of traditional *morna* with *fado*, samba and other styles from across the lusophone world. Exploring this linguistic link, Vieira is joined by Remna Schwarz, who has Cape Verdean heritage but has lived all over West Africa and beyond, on 'Singa'. The pair's two different versions of Portuguese-Creole come together for a sweet lament arranged by Peruvian musician Jorge Cervantes who also plays bass on much of the album. Brazil, the Basque Country and Ukraine are also represented here, making for a truly international album. With 14 tracks *Gente* provides an extensive tour of styles and themes that interest Vieira, as well as showcasing the myriad influences upon Cape Verdean sound. The opening 'Sol Di Nha Vida' combines the local *funaná* style with samba in what, we are told, Kaka Barbosa called '*funamba*', while we hear the inflections of West African pop music on songs such as 'Ta Cundum Cundum'. My personal favourite track of Vieira's *Gente* is the achingly beautiful 'Princesa'.

*TOM NEWELL*

TRACK TO TRY *Sol Di Nha Vida*

TOP OF THE WORLD TRACK 5

## The Zawose Queens
Maisha

Real World Records

★★★★★

*Maisha* is an exquisite debut of originals that vividly bring to life the music of the Gogo (also Wagogo) people from Tanzania's Dodoma region. The Zawose Queens are Pendo and Leah Zawose, the daughter and granddaughter of the late Hukwe Zawose (a fellow Real World labelmate). Having been previously relegated to the background, *Maisha* marks the first release where the Zawose women take centre stage, and it is outstanding. Co-produced by Oli Barton-Wood (Obongjayar) and Tom Excell (Nubiyan Twist, Onipa), the music marries traditional Gogo music with subtle electronic elements, creating a soundscape that is both authentic and contemporary (this was part of a British Council-funded initiative aimed at blending traditional sounds with modern beats). The tracks definitely recall elements of their brother/uncle Msafiri's *Uhamiaji* but have an earthier quality, feeling somehow more grounded. The electronic elements are subtle, offering the music a wider appeal, but the stars of the show are really the Queens' voices and the traditional *chizeze* (fiddle), *illimba* (thumb piano) and *ngoma* drums. There's a strong connection to the traditional music, but all 11 tracks are originals. The title-track is an absolute banger, driven by the illimba that belongs on any world-wise dancefloor and its lyrics are highly relatable ('*hustling is hard, work is hard, life is also hard*'). Other standout tracks include 'Fahari Yetu', celebrating Gogo traditions, 'Sauti Ya Mama', a heartfelt ode to motherly love recorded live on a Zanzibari hotel rooftop, 'Lulelule' which showcases the voice of elder Baba Leah (Leah's father), and 'Masanja Kalila', a song about missing home with the delightful lyrics '*an onion is a vegetable… when mixed with meat it is still a vegetable.*' More than gifting us an album of unique and too little-known East African music, Leah and Pendo are setting an inspiring example for other female artists. Long live The Queens.

*ALEXANDRA PETROPOULOS*

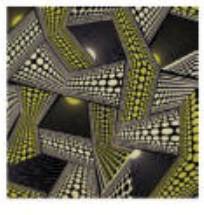
TRACK TO TRY *Maisha*

## VARIOUS ARTISTS

### Ghana Special 2: Electronic Highlife & Afro Sounds in the Diaspora, 1980-93

Soundway

★★★½☆



This compilation, the second in a Soundways series that started with 2009's *Modern Highlife, Afro Sounds & Ghanaian Blues 1968-1981*, focuses on a phase of Ghanaian highlife when the dance bands that dominated national cultural life through the 'golden age' of the 1960s and 1970s were undermined by the political and technological changes of the 1980s. Established and aspiring Ghanaian musicians moved abroad and many found their way to Germany where 'Burger Highlife' ('*Bürger*' is German for 'citizen') was born through dialogue with the local trends and technologies. Pat Thomas, formerly a member of Ebo Taylor's legendary highlife bands, found himself in Berlin. His entry in the compilation, 'Gye Wani' – released for this album on March 6, Ghanaian Independence day – displays only a subtle garnish from the Burger scene in the form of a muscular funk bass style. Other tracks on *Ghana Special 2* are more radical fusions. 'Pepper, Onion, Ginger & Salt' by MC Mambo is a synth-powered strut over which MC Mambo delivers a proto-rap, bemoaning the girls who pass by ignoring his hot new grooves. Some of the eccentric stylistic and production choices provoke sympathy with MC Mambo's disinterested passersby but the distinctive earworm guitar grooves remain compelling. *Ghana Special 2: Electronic Highlife & Afro Sounds in the Diaspora, 1980-93* is an illuminating exercise in cultural and music history.

*LIAM IZOD*

TRACK TO TRY *Gye Wani* by Pat Thomas

Michael Mbwambo

## Bruno Berle
No Reino dos Afetos 2

Far Out Recordings

★★★★½

For his second outing Berle, now relocated to São Paulo from his home state of Alagoas, has once more co-produced with fellow Alagoan, Batata Boy. While their first record had a lo-fi production out of necessity, there are certainly bigger production values on show here, bringing out the all-round gorgeousness of the songs. Berle prefers a strong mix of traditional MPB and romance with a tight control on melody, singing in service to these melancholic love songs, following a Northeastern tradition of songwriting. The contemporary production is not cluttered, there are simple melodic lines with elements of R&B and electronics that showcase strong pop songs so mellifluous they could have come from *Clube de Esquina*, or even 80s period Djavan. 'Margem do Céu' has a jazzy happy-go-lucky swing, but with interesting synth sounds burbling in the background. A light touch of AutoTune on 'Acorda e Vem' plumbs the aquatic depths of Frank Ocean, while 'Tirolirole' is swooning. Perhaps seeing something of himself, Berle covers an early 1970s track by Arthur Russell on 'Love Comes Back', which he interprets with gushing tones. Berle has a future so bright in Brazilian music he should be wearing factor 50 sunscreen.

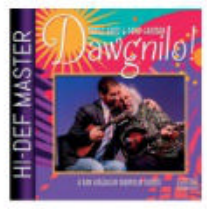
*ANDY CUMMING*

TRACK TO TRY *Tirolirole*

## Danilo Brito & David Grisman
Dawgnilo!

Acoustic Disc

★★★½




*Dawgnilo!* brings together two mandolin maestros, Brazilian Brito and American Grisman. The latter emerged from the Greenwich Village scene as a performer and producer who worked with such greats as John Sebastian, Judy Collins, James Taylor, Linda Ronstadt and the Grateful Dead. That band's Jerry Garcia dubbed Grisman 'Dawg', hence this conjunction of 'Dawg' and Danilo Brito is titled *Dawgnilo!*. The mandolin duo is supported beautifully by an uncluttered bedrock of guitar and bass accompaniment from musical friends and family – (among the musicians are Grisman's wife and son). Grisman blends bluegrass and gypsy jazz while Brito is a master of *choro* – that vibrant form of Brazilian instrumental music that draws on European and African influences, with an emphasis on virtuosity and improvisation. Their distinct approaches combine and complement each other perfectly. Choro classics like Jacob do Bandolim's 'Migalhas de Amor' and 'Assanhado' sit alongside originals like 'Tracy's Tune' and 'Dawgalypso'. *Dawgnilo!* is described as '*a Pan-American mandolin summit*,' making it sound rather a solemn affair whereas, in fact, it's a delightful collection of tunes, full of zest and fun.

*TONY GILLAM*

TRACK TO TRY *Migalhas De Amor*

## Céu
Novela

Urban Jungle

★★★☆☆

*Novela* is Céu's sixth album, her first in three years, and it's mostly self-penned (the one exception being 'Corpo e Colo', written by Nando Reis and Kleber Lucas). It's a contrast to her last release *Um Gosto de Sol* which concentrated on interpretations of tunes by artists like Alcione, João Gilberto and Rita Lee. *Novela* is produced by Adrian Younge, an iconic arranger and producer known for his US hip-hop work, but who has also dabbled in Brazilian music (check out his work with Azymuth and João Donato). The single, 'Gerando na Alta', features London-based French-Senegalese artist anaiis who spent a month-long residency in Salvador, Bahia to reconnect with her Senegalese heritage through the omnipresent Afro-Brazilian music. We hear melodies sung in both Portuguese and English laid over a bed of *congas*, bass and

# BRAZIL
*by Andy Cumming*

Naná Vasconcelos, who died in 2016, has always had a special place in the hearts of Brazilian music lovers. For me, he was the first Brazilian artist I saw play live in London way back in the 1980s. **Fred Soul & Zé Luis Nascimento** pay homage to the much-missed man on ***Viva Naná*** (Barkhane ***). There's a light touch, and a certain Gallic quality, in these semi-improvised recordings. The title-track is a good place to start, Indigenous chants with Nascimento's light-fingered percussion and swathes of piano played by multi-instrumentalist Fred Soul.

What the country blues of Charley Patton is to American folk music, so is this guitar picking to the musical hinterlands of Brazil. The viola of **Mestre Manelim** on ***Deixa a Viola Me Levar*** (Selo Sesc ****) is one of the purest expressions of music from the backlands of Urucuia, in Minas Gerais. Seu Manelim (1939-2020) worked in the fields during the day and at night he would play guitar in the yard inspired by the *inhuma*, lizards and parrots. Guitarist and writer Paulo Freire also worked on the farm and, at night, learned the secrets of the guitar from the master. This album of charming, deceptively simple country compositions, recordings taken from between 2002 and 2012, are mostly by Manelim himself.

Another Brazilian relocated to Lisbon, **Carlos Cavallini**'s debut album ***O Tamanho do Tempo*** (Carlos Cavallini ***) is a more than competent set of MPB made more interesting by the contributors and producers Ricardo Dias Gomes and Domenico Lancellotti, whose work at The Cave studio certainly seems to be defining a Rio/Lisbon avant-samba sound. There's some samba soul, lilting romance and plenty of philosophical lyrics. 'Sempre Mar' is a real charmer, there's an epic-sounding arrangement for 'Palavra' and the title-track makes use of an atmospheric echoing noise effect.

In a rare combination, **Natalie Cressman & Ian Faquini** pair the trombone with classical guitar on ***GUINGA*** (GroundUP ***) to interpret the compositions of Carlos Althier de Souza Lemos Escobar, more commonly known as Guinga, the composer and guitarist who worked with Clara Nunes, Cartola and Beth Carvalho. There's a languid, lazy, sunny afternoon feeling to the arrangements, the deep relaxing tones of the trombone with the harmonic pairing of the guitar lull the listener into a languorous state. The compositions are finely played though the arrangements have a limited sonic palette that makes it a little repetitive over 14 tracks.

Fred Soul & Zé Luis Nascimento

Wurlitzer, creating a hypnotic, laid-back groove. The title-track has a similar mood, but this time with drums driving an accompaniment that expands into thick string arrangements at climactic points, like the beginning of the chorus (an Adrian Younge trademark). An album with a well-developed, but perhaps slightly repetitive sonic identity, accessible for lovers of instrumental hip-hop and neo-soul alike, all with Céu's unique take on Brazilian groove.

*CHARLOTTE ALGAR*

TRACK TO TRY *Gerando na Alta (feat anaiis)*

## Flavia Coelho
Ginga

[PIAS]

★★★★☆

The fifth album by Brazilian singer-songwriter Flavia Coelho is brimming with uplifting, catchy melodies, which have become her signature appeal. Coelho launched her music career upon moving to France over ten years ago, where she met French producer and arranger Victor Vagh-Weinmann. *Ginga*'s theme is largely one of womanhood. 'Nordestina' is a tribute to the maternal women of the historically harsh Northeast region of Brazil: '*Mulher maravilha… a moca bonita, a pele morena… menina da terra, leoa da selva…*' (*Wonder woman… beautiful, dark-skinned girl… child of the earth, lioness of the jungle*). 'Sistema Solar' is a dreamy ballad of the immersive pull of a woman's love; imbued with Coelho's velvety smooth, sexy vocals. And in 'Mama Santa' Coelho sings of the challenges faced by women, as embodied by her mother, as well as of her own self-determination. The ten tracks take us on a tour through Coelho's musical versatility; from funk, house and reggae, to the more traditional MPB samba beat, such as in the infectiously danceable 'Mais Amor'. The orchestration woven around *Ginga*'s silky vocals is impressive too; from playful brass riffs to psychedelic synths and Afro-Brazilian percussion; all composed by Coelho and arranged with Vagh-Weinmann.

*HUW HENNESSY*

TRACK TO TRY *Nordestina*

## Djalma Corrêa
Espontaneamente se Tenta: Aventuras Sonoras de Djalma Corrêa

Lugar Alto

★★★★☆

Alvaro Gumucio Li

While Djalma Corrêa (1942-2022) is renowned for his research into Afro-Brazilian percussion and his work with the Tropicalistas Doces Bárbaros, this collection of unreleased material opens up another world to the compositions of Corrêa, showing his electro-acoustic work with a singular Afro-Brazilian vision. Before his death, the two label bosses of Lugar Alto worked with Corrêa at his ranch and found a huge collection of unreleased material from all stages of his career. 'Evolução (Para Fita e Filme)' is a drone piece that goes into the outer limits of sound using graphic notation similar to the style of Pierre Schaeffer. 'Exemplo de Sintetizadores' exemplifies the bizarre mixed-bag to be found in the collection, 70s soft-core synths and gentle brush strokes producing decidedly lush melodies. 'Suíte Contagotas' is the ideas of Walter Smetak in action, a one-take piece recorded in the water tank of the Bahia Federal University, dripping water miked up and put through effects using natural echo. Then, to round off the suite, the piece bizarrely finishes with a brief chamber orchestra interlude. The live recording 'Bossa 2000 dC' is considered one of the first pieces of electronic music performed in Brazil, it begins with some intriguing proto-bleeps in the style of the *Forbidden Planet* soundtrack with an almost repetitive bassline quietly humming in the background, then the cacophony starts with rolling distorted percussion. Fascinating stuff.

*ANDY CUMMING*

TRACK TO TRY *Bossa 2000 dC*

TOP OF THE WORLD
TRACK 10

## Ibelisse Guardia Ferragutti & Frank Rosaly
MESTIZX

International Anthem & Nonesuch

★★★★☆

This is a concept album of sorts from the husband-and-wife team of drummer Frank Rosaly and singer Ibelisse Guardia Ferragutti, whose inspiration for this record stems from their ancestral roots in Bolivia, Brazil and Puerto Rico, through which they seek to explore themes of decolonization, ritual and protest. Rosaly's collaborative credits include work with free jazz legend Peter Brotzmann, experimental guitarist Nels Cline and avant-rock icon Thurston Moore. Ferragutti is a multi-medium artist who has presented her works in a variety of spaces internationally. *MESTIZX* is their debut combined venture. Opener 'INVOCAÇÃO' is a moody, ambitious affair whose compositions float over Rosaly's superb jazz rhythms, with sparse piano melodies, ominous bass and drifting clouds of vibraphone. Lead single 'DESTEJER' whips up a compelling sonic palette of shimmering keys, pulsing hand percussion and slow-drawn brass. Ferragutti's vocals reverberate with ghostly power. The title-track is a downtempo *tropicália* meditation with gently declaimed vocals, circling guitar and jagged sparks of synth. As a whole, Ferragutti & Rosaly's *MESTIZX* provides a surfeit of depth and emotion, full of inventive compositions and variety.

*CHRIS WHEATLEY*

TRACK TO TRY *TURBULÊNCIA*

## Ana Egge
Sharing in the Spirit

StorySound Records

★★★☆☆

With *Sharing in the Spirit*, singer-songwriter Ana Egge shares eight original songs plus covers of songs by Ted Hawkins and Sinéad O'Connor. Stylistically, the music ranges across country, folk and indie-pop territory while drilling down into tales of the human condition partly drawn from the composer's dreams. The garage rock setting of the album opener, 'Don't You Sleep', provides a contrasting showcase for Egge's luminous, lithe voice in an ▸

expression of support for social and political change propelled by love and maintained by alertness. 'Door Won't Close' starts out in pure country style with acoustic and electric guitars strung along by a gamboling lap steel, later joined by a sweetly bowed fiddle, which imparts a deceptively smooth path for a song about an abusive relationship. With bluesy resignation, Egge faces up to the consequences of her struggles with alcoholism while paying tribute to the enduring love that saved her in 'Mission Bells Moan'. Beautiful harmony singing and guitar accompaniment courtesy of Michael 'Squeaky' Robinson elevate the bluegrass ballad 'Where Berries Grow' to heavenly heights. For a tribute to Sinéad O'Connor, Egge ends *Sharing in the Spirit* with a rendering of the late Irish singer-songwriter's 'Last Day of Our Acquaintance' (from 1990's *I Do Not Want What I Haven't Got*) with deeply moving solemnity.

*DOUG DELOACH*

**TRACK TO TRY** ***Don't You Sleep***

## The Folklorkestra
### A Strange Day in June

Smiling Fez

★★★★½

Led by mandolin, guitar, banjo, flute, harmonica and *sitar* player John Kruth, New York-based The Folklorkestra are a mostly instrumental sextet that also showcase the talents of Premik Russell Tubbs on wind, brass and lap steel, Kathy Halvorson on horn and oboe, Kenny Margolis on assorted keyboards, bassist Ray Peterson and Rohin Khemani on eclectic percussion. Together, thanks to help from a Chamber Music America grant and the Howard Gilman Foundation, they create an extraordinary form of acoustic chamber music that draws on a dazzling array of folkloric musical traditions. Jazz ('Cooking with Lightning'), zydeco ('(Be Careful What You Say to) An Armed Lady'), tango ('Mariska (with Ancestor Dancer)'), Latin ('A Pair of Boleros( *à la* Ravel & Beck)'), klezmer ('The Girl I Never Knew') , European Gypsy music ('My Cousin the Spy'), ambient ('Orange Sky'), calypso ('Madame Gonzo'), oriental mysticism ('Meet Me in the Meadow') and baroque classicism ('A Strange Day in June (with We Fight, We Bury the Dead, Then We Eat, Drink and Dance)') are all grist to The Folklorkestra's mill. Yet it's never as simple or straightforward as that, for all these are ground together into something that manages to sound both familiar and new at the same time, in a hybrid patchwork that seems to fuse past, present and future and defy time. "Musical boundaries are not our strong suit," bassist Ray Peterson notes – which is exactly what makes The Folklorkestra's *A Strange Day in June* such an unexpected delight and almost impossible to describe.

*NIGEL WILLIAMSON*

**TRACK TO TRY** ***Meet Me in the Meadow***

## Myriam Gendron
### Mayday

Thrill Jockey

★★★★½

For Québec-based guitarist and singer Myriam Gendron's fascinating 2014 debut record, she took the unusual step of recording a concept album inspired by the works of poet Dorothy Parker. She went on to release *Ma Délire* in 2021, an album of '*songs of love*', and reissue the Parker collection, *Not So Deep as a Well,* last year. Now she returns with the addition of drummer Jim White (Dirty Three, PJ Harvey, Kurt Vile) plus bassist Cédric Dind-Lavoie, electric guitarists Bill Nace and Marisa Anderson, and saxophonist Zoh Amba. This record provides an intriguing shift from the sole guitar and voice setting of the debut, but the latter's beautiful spirit of simplicity carries over. We get the best of both worlds, with jewels such as 'There is No East or West'

# ROOTS *US & CANADA*

*by Devon Léger*

The US is roiling now with waves of student protest, the trials of the orange man and the upcoming election, so it's a good time to be looking at artists who are catalysts for change. Here's some who are breaking the mould, building new ideas and redefining genres in the US and Canada.

It's been delightful to see a wave of African artists in Americana recently, and a testament to the ever more open world we live in. Artists like Peter One, Mon Rovia and now Ugandan-born **Jon Muq**, who has a debut album on The Black Keys' Easy Eye Sound, are making waves in the US. Muq's voice on ***Flying Away*** (Easy Eye Sound ★★★★) is a glory, and his life story is powerful, but what's most interesting here is that he's setting the template for what's likely to be the next big sound: light elements of Afrobeats-like R&B, some folk instrumentation, a bit of country, and a dose of vintage soul. As Africa dominates the world stage more and more, the continent's incursion into Americana and roots music is most welcome.

Despite many artists in roots, Americana and trad dedicating their socials to news of the Israel-Palestine conflict, and many pleas to Free Palestine, there haven't been too many protest albums coming out of these genres. It's strange then that the powerful compilation album, ***Songs Not Bombs Vol 2*** (Songs Not Bombs ★★★), has flown so far under the radar. Compiled by Kentucky singer-songwriter Jordan Smart, this comp features mostly exclusive tracks from a host of great roots and Americana artists, with all proceeds donated to the Palestinian Children's Relief Fund. Billy Bragg resurrects his 2006 protest song 'The Lonesome Death of Rachel Corrie', while Adeem the Artist's haunting 'How Do I Explain this to My Son' is a stand-out track. Other artists include Carsie Blanton, Mama's Broke, Rachel Baiman, Possessed by Paul James, Al Scorch, Chris Pierce and more.

Speaking of **Adeem the Artist**, their new album, ***Anniversary*** (Four Quarters/Thirty Tigers ★★★★★) is an absolute triumph of songwriting. We knew they could turn a deft phrase, with a kind of wry wit that's too rare these days in country music – their takedown of Jason Aldean's chilling 'Try That in a Small Town' was a masterpiece – but for folks hoping for more expert trolling, the new album is remarkably restrained. Adeem leans on their ear for a beautiful love song, and honestly there are so few queer love songs in country music that we could stand to get a full album of them. Of course, Adeem still has great protest songs on this album, like 'Nightmare', a disturbing look at the Christian far right taking hold in America, or 'Night Sweats', a haunting tale of a dead child in Palestine. This will easily be one of the best Americana albums of the year.

Adeem the Artist

How many times have we heard about an artist moving between genres easily? It's usually hype, but the new album, ***Chandler***, from Canadian Cree artist **Wyatt C Louis** (Royal Mountain ★★★★) might make you believe in a genre-less world. Utterly smooth vocals, soft pedal steel, beautifully heartworn lyrics... Louis' music wears its heart on its sleeve, softly pouring out love songs. There's more at work beneath the surface though, as Louis playfully subverts binaries, both in gender and in the 'country music or not' divides of their Calgary home. And even when their lyrics hint at classic country tropes, it's from a decidedly Indigenous and Canadian perspective: '*And you're carefree / With pounding drums / To take you home / Night falls hard / On these dusty roads.*'

Born in the heart of the Mississippi Delta, it's perhaps no surprise that pianist and singer **Eden Brent** (Yellow Dog ★★★) would turn to the blues. She learned early on from blues pianist Abie 'Boogaloo' Ames, and has carried the torch for his boogie-woogie piano playing ever since. Her new album, ***Getaway Blues***, however, was recorded in London! Though you might think she's following the lead of blues greats like BB King and Howlin' Wolf, who crossed the pond to make great albums, she got the idea from her husband, British jazz trumpeter Bob Dowell. Forming a group of the best studio musicians, this album mines a deep vein of blues balladry. With her smoky vocals, it's a great delivery of a classic sound.

Holly Rainey

presenting Gendron's quite wonderful fingerpicked guitar playing unaccompanied, both gentle and stirring as it is. Elsewhere, we have the full band, and together the players weave an organic tapestry which feels intimate and suffused with nature. 'Long Way Home' is testament to Gendron's skills as both composer and lyricist – cocooning the listener inside a bitter-sweet soundworld. Across every track, the assembled musicians play with an openness and togetherness, breathing magical life into this talented artist's work.

*CHRIS WHEATLEY*

TRACK TO TRY *La Luz*

## Hermanos Gutiérrez
Sonido Cósmico

Easy Eye Sound

★★★☆☆

Hermanos Gutiérrez have been winning hearts around the world with their transcendent guitar sound recalling desert skies and lonely highways. On their new record, *Sonido Cósmico*, the Swiss-Ecuadorian guitar duo have veered off the ol' dusty freeway to explore the rhythm and spirit of *cumbia* and salsa. For those craving more of their beautifully intertwined fingerpicking and reverb-laden bends, the brothers will not disappoint. The first two tracks, 'Lágrimas Negras' and 'Low Sun', remain in familiar territory, as does much of the record. By track three, 'Cumbia Lunar', the duo's desire to break from their trademark sound begins to shine through. The beat invites sensual movement while stylish licks doused with wah-wah add a touch of verdancy to the desert soundscape. 'It's All in Your Mind' also moves the sound forward. With a touch of soul, some Clapton-esque blues licks and a tickle of organ, it exudes a spirit of hope. Up next, the title-track boasts some fantastic flange work and a lead melody that pierces the heart with an air of 'New Slang' by The Shins. While the lack of attention-grabbing hooks could relegate this to background music for some, the beautiful imagery, elegant tranquillity, and heartfelt playing will leave most utterly spellbound.

*DAN HOBSON*

TRACK TO TRY *It's All in Your Mind*

## Kaia Kater
Strange Medicine

TOP ROOTS

Free Dirt Records

★★★★★

David McMurry

Over a series of increasingly impressive albums Kater has grown from a banjo-playing traditionalist into a thrillingly adventurous songwriter. Kater was born in Québec to a Canadian mother and a Caribbean father. Her last album, 2018's *Grenades*, was raw and stripped back, but *Strange Medicine* is a far more cinematic record with strings, horns and synths layered over her rhythmic banjo playing. Many of the songs tackle the big issues – "colonialism, sexism, racism and misogyny" – but she transforms poison into medicine by celebrating the resilience of the human spirit in overcoming adversity. Songs such as 'The Internet' and 'Floodlights' are informed by her own lived experience but there are powerful historical narratives, too, such as 'The Witch', an ode to a woman persecuted in the Salem trials, and 'Fédon (feat Taj Mahal)' about the Grenadian folk hero Julien Fédon, who over 200 years ago led a rebellion against the island's British colonial rulers. Guest vocalists Taj Mahal, Allison Russell and Aoife O'Donovan duet with Kater's own wonderfully expressive voice on an album for the ages.

*NIGEL WILLIAMSON*

TRACK TO TRY *Fédon*

## Mélisande
Rembobine

Les Disques Passeport

★★★★☆

For the past ten years, the Québécois band Mélisande [éléctrotrad] has been creating dancefloor electro versions of traditional French-Canadian songs with wild visuals. One of the most groundbreaking Québécois trad bands, they brought a deep breath of creativity and dug deep into the tradition to focus especially on songs from women's voices, often with biting messages that have been carried over the years by many unknown women. For their tenth anniversary, lead singer Mélisande is breaking out under her own name with a retrospective, *Rembobine* (meaning 'Rewind'), of the band's best songs, reworked acoustically. Where 'Ti-Pétard Allard' rolled out originally with a heavy funk bassline on their 2019 album, *Les Myriades*, here it's more intimate, powered by the acoustic guitar of Jean Desrochers and Gabriel Girouard's fiddling. 'Le Pied Su'l Cant' features a powerhouse fiddle and flute duet with Mélisande's partner Alexandre de Grosbois-Garand (formerly of Genticorum). On *Rembobine*, Mélisande touches on all the great tropes of Québécois song, from mystical bird messenger songs to surreal lying songs and especially the beloved drinking song genre. But she brings a much-needed feminine perspective, sometimes funny and sometimes poignant, to a tradition that usually focuses on male groups. With *Rembobine*, Mélisande also takes her place as a focused and dedicated bandleader in a tradition with very few women at the helm. And it's about time!

*DEVON LÉGER*

TRACK TO TRY *Le Pied Su'l Cant*

TOP OF THE WORLD TRACK 2

## Swamp Dogg
Blackgrass: From West Virginia to 125th St

Oh Boy Records

★★★★★

Frankly, it's unfortunate that psych soul stalwart Swamp Dogg's label chose to announce his new foray into bluegrass with the raunchy 'Mess Up Under Your Dress'. Though it speaks to Dogg's irreverence and sly humour, it says nothing about what this album is. It's not a jokey one-off from an artist curious about a new genre, this album is a full-blown reworking of bluegrass from the ground up from an early insider. Though Dogg's never recorded bluegrass before, he says that he grew up loving it as a young kid in the 1940s. To pay homage to the genre, and to show the Black roots of the music, Dogg's new album, *Blackgrass: From West Virginia to 125th St*, brings together some of the brightest stars in bluegrass, from Noam Pikelny to Sierra Hull. Led by album producer Ryan Olson of Bon Iver, the arrangements here craft astounding new worlds for the genre. They're caught halfway between the stringband roots of bluegrass, and the string-drenched soul and R&B that Dogg is better known for. As a songwriter, Dogg's written thousands of songs on every topic imaginable, so it's perhaps no surprise that he can nail a sad country ballad ('Curtains on the Window') as easily as a regretful protest song ('Songs to Sing') or a creepy murder ballad. Ultimately the point is that Dogg is an artist who's impossible to pin down. Like his friend John Prine, his artistry will always rove free.

*DEVON LÉGER*

TRACK TO TRY *Curtains on the Window*

## Pine Tree Flyers
Pine Tree Flyers

Pine Tree Flyers

★★★☆☆

The Pine Tree Flyers' full-length debut album proudly waves the banner of New England (US) roots music. ▸

Fundamentally, this fiddle-based acoustic music was derived from the traditional Scots-Irish and Celtic repertoire, which informs most of contemporary old-time, bluegrass and string band playing. What lifts the 11 tracks on *Pine Tree Flyers* above the fray is a lightness of being, a sweet soulful exuberance and palpable delicacy discernible in the performance and material, which permeates songs such as 'Lady of the Lake / Lady Walpole / Lady Ann Montgomery', 'Elly's / Îles de la Madeleine' and 'Shadows on the Lawn'. All of the members of Pine Tree Flyers – Katie McNally (fiddle), Emily Troll (accordion), Owen Marshall (guitar) and Neil Pearlman (piano) – hail from Portland, Maine, which is in the extreme northeast corner of America. This particular geolocation accounts for the Québécois and Nova Scotian influences in the steadily rollicking rhythm and bright melodic riffing that run through 'La Bastringue / Joys of Québec' and 'Smith's Reel / Point-au-Pic'. Pine Tree Flyers want to raise what was previously considered mere 'dance music' to a place of significance alongside its Americana and Canadiana kin. With this debut, they might well consider their mission accomplished.

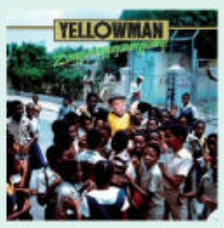
*DOUG DELOACH*

TRACK TO TRY *Elly's / Îles de la Madeleine*

## Yellowman
### Zungguzungguguzungguzeng!

Greensleeves / VP Music Group

★★★★☆




Back in 1983, two years after the death of Bob Marley, Yellowman was the most successful performer in Jamaica. Born Winston Foster and brought up in an orphanage, he had overcome poverty and a tough childhood to become a dancehall deejay star, an albino who then sported bright yellow dreadlocks and succeeded thanks to his often bragging lyrics and extraordinary vocal skills, hardly pausing for breath as he chatted and chanted over the backing rhythms before breaking into an unexpected variety of songs.

This was the year when he gave a memorable performance at Pickett's Lock, a large sports hall north of Edmonton which was surrounded by massed ranks of police. Unlike Marley, he hadn't been allowed to play in central London, though he could have packed Earl's Court. As I noted at the time, his audience was almost entirely Caribbean, for he then had little following among white reggae enthusiasts who might have been startled that he included Peter, Paul & Mary's 'Leaving on a Jet Plane' in his highly entertaining set.

This was also the year when he released the album *Zungguzungguguzungguzeng!*, now re-released for Record Store Day as a limited edition on suitably yellow vinyl. Joined by his sparring partner Fathead, and backed by Roots Radics and Hi-Times Bands, he recorded the set at Joe Gibbs and Channel One Studios in Jamaica, and it explains why the island loved him. It starts, of course, with the title-track, a song that most other DJs would have found hard to even pronounce. Half-singing, half-speaking over the repeated and rhythmic reggae riffs, he's in exuberant form, urging his audience to '*jump for happiness and jump for joy*' before heading off into the bragging, claiming '*Yellowman have too much girlfriend... mi have a hundred and ten... all of dem have yellow children*.'

Musically, the style rarely changes, with the slinky, sometimes raw riffs often dominated by the basslines and interspersed with dub effects. But he does alter the subject matter, with 'The Good, The Bad & The Ugly (feat Fathead)' dealing with his tough early life when '*sometime we haffi sleep on the cold concrete*.' There's more bragging, and a fine infectious dance riff on 'Who Can Make the Dance Ram' (the answer of course being that no other DJ can match his skills), while 'Take Me to Jamaica (feat Fathead)' is a rousing, dub-heavy tribute to the women of the island. Each side of the album features a religious piece, as if to make sure that his dancehall style will also appeal to a Rasta audience: 'Can't Hide From Jah' is packed with such advice as. '*I beg you, honour your mother and father*.' Yellowman was no Bob Marley, but he could certainly ram the dance.

*ROBIN DENSELOW*

TRACK TO TRY *Who Can Make the Dance Ram*

## Rubel
### As Palavras, Vol 1 and 2

Mr Bongo

★★★★☆

The city of Rio de Janeiro oozes out of the rhythms and words of this double album by Latin Grammy-nominated Rubel Brisolla (who goes more simply as Rubel), his third album combining the funk boom bap of the *tamborzão*, samba choruses and the solid grooves of Rio, it's all here in this genre-jumping mixtape. An orchestral overture opens, signalling Rubel's ambition for this project; 'Não Vou Reclamar de Deus' takes us back to the sublime 70s *bailes*, while the ease with which Rubel mixes genres is demonstrated on 'Posso Dizer', skipping from melodic samba to *carioca* funk seamlessly. 'Toda Beleza (Pelos Lorinhos)' features the voices of Bala Desejo in an intimate piece of MPB, and 'As Palavras' with Tim Bernardes is minimalism which actually underlines the soulfulness of his singing. Does Bernardes ever run out of great tunes? The multifaceted 'Torto Arado', features Liniker and Luedji Luna who voice the different narrators from the titular book by Itamar Vieira Junior (published in the UK as *Crooked Plow*), which examines race and servitude in modern Brazil. Further on, there's a carnivalesque *marchina*, followed by samba with a twist of jazz bass, *batidão* and even distant blues backing vocals. The constant skipping on *As Palavras, Vol 1 and 2* shows a hyperactive talent and the album works best when Rubel's wide-ranging versatility brings everything together.

*ANDY CUMMING*

TRACK TO TRY *Não Vou Reclamar de Deus*

## Tablao de Tango
### De Alcohol y Desamor

Geomuse / Caramba Records

★★★★☆

A supergroup eminently deserving of that title, Tablao de Tango bring together three greats of Argentinian music: Franco Luciani on harmonica, whose style embraces tango, classical, blues and jazz; virtuoso guitarist Rudi Flores, and the highly popular crossover artist, singer Walter 'Chino' Laborde. Special guests for this set include esteemed vocalist Sandra Rumolino, plus guitarists Moscato Luna and Raul Kioko. Individually, these are among the most respected tango players around. Throwing talent together doesn't always work, but *De Alcohol y Desamor* makes for a beguiling listen. The contrasting elements provided by the core trio are striking. Laborde's deep, rounded voice, full of pathos, is the glue which binds the songs. Flores' ringing guitar, urgent and dramatic one instant, softly rhythmic the next, does a wonderful job of fleshing out the mood, with ornate finger-picked runs and dreamy cadences. Luciani's mouth organ provides flashes of colour, dashing as a cavalier, yet also earthy and rooted. *De Alcohol y Desamor* is an album worthy of repeated listens in order to pick out the nuance and subtlety of each artist. One for connoisseurs of classic tango.

*CHRIS WHEATLEY*

TRACK TO TRY *Secreto*

George Williams

Grupo Yakambu from *Discomoda Salsa de Venezuela*

## LATIN REISSUES
BY MARK SAMPSON

### Toño y Sus Sicodélicos
Mister Boogaloo

Vampiosul

★★☆☆☆

There's a sense of Pérez Prado in listening to Toño y Sus Sicodélicos' *Mister Boogaloo*. This must have been the hope of Peru's Disperú label when it commissioned trumpeter Toño Reyes in 1967 to form a band and record an album to reflect the latest boogaloo and other trends then emerging from New York. The opening title-track is almost as thrillingly cheesy as Prado's 'Patricia', but you soon realise how hackneyed it all is. The brass, percussion and mechanical organ combine on a splendid version of The Champs' 'Tequila', but a little of such like goes a long way.

### Traffic Sound
Virgin

Munster Records

★★★☆☆

Raised as a youth on prog, I find it hard to listen comfortably to Traffic Sound. The Peruvian prog-rockers' *Virgin* is full of such gauche generic devices as the backward vocal on 'A Place in Time Call [sic] "You And Me"'. One has to swallow hard and listen to numbers like the earnest acoustic (but melodically rather lovely) 'Simple' and the self-indulgent 'Yellow Sea Days (March 7th, March 8th, March 9th)' in the context of the era. Let's be grateful that this band gave the world the sublime penultimate track, 'Meshkalina', prog-pop every bit as pure as, say, The Doors' 'Hello, I Love You'.

### VARIOUS ARTISTS
Discomoda Salsa de Venezuela 1964-1977

Olindo Records

★★★★☆

And finally... *Discomoda Salsa de Venezuela 1964-1977* is a splendid compilation of gems from the Discomoda label's vaults. If this survey of Venezuela's so-called 'golden age' provides a little less variety (and salient information) than the Ansonia Records compilation reviewed last issue, the 21 vocal and instrumental tracks by artists like Nelso y sus Estrellas, Principe y su Sexteto and the splendidly named Microbanda Marabina nevertheless offer red-hot salsa with a distinct Venezuelan twist that sets it apart from some of the more formulaic stuff emerging from New York at that time.




Kathryn Tickell & The Darkening

"...tremendously energising, polished and thought-provoking..."
AMERICANA-UK

photo credit: Georgia Claire

SUMMER FESTIVALS 2024

July 4th
Gate to Southwell Festival, UK

July 12th
The Butchart Gardens Summer Concerts, BC, Canada

July 13th-14th
Vancouver Island MusicFest, BC, Canada

July 17th
Harrison Festival of the Arts, BC, Canada

July 19th
Het Lindeboom Festival, France

July 21st
Cambridge Summer Music Festival, UK

August 8th
Cropredy, UK

August 9th
Broadstairs Folk Week, UK

August 17th
Cumberlandia, UK

August 25th-26th
Shrewsbury Folk Festival, UK

Latest album cloud horizons out now

www.kathryntickell.com

## Josienne Clarke
Parenthesis, I

Corduroy Punk

★★★★½

Now with a number of bold solo albums under her belt and a successful record label, it's hard to remember a time when UK songwriter and songbird Josienne Clarke was anything other than a leading lady. But she used to feel swallowed up by the music industry, constrained by her label, by the duo that had overwhelmed her artistry, by the 'folk' genre itself. Breaking free of these chains may have been difficult, but it gifted us a singular artist with no limitations on her art. With her new album, *Parenthesis, I*, Clarke's songwriting feels effortless. She exudes confidence, content to trust her own songwriting power and to let her glorious voice shine a beacon forward. Each track on the new album has a different flavour. 'Spherical' has a rhythmic carnival bounce to it, as Clarke sings of endings that become beginnings again, while 'Dead Woman's Bones' brings shimmering flute and echoey piano together with haunting lyrics. Here, Clarke riffs on her first roots in British folk, but throughout she blazes a new path for herself, moving from the uncertainty and change of earlier years to a new era of self-assured confidence. '*I let the heartless make a host of me / And they plundered me for melody*' she sings in 'Most of All', but those days are gone now.

*DEVON LÉGER*

TRACK TO TRY *Most of All*

## Clash Vooar
Pulled by the Stars

Clash Vooar

★★★½☆

'Clash Vooar' is Manx for Big Groove, and the band's second album includes a batch of sturdy grooves, along with influences that range from local folk themes through to R&B and jazz. With a line-up including bass, keys, trumpet and flute, the band match catchy, controlled riffs against the cool and impressive vocals of the Manx Gaelic singer-songwriter Aalin Clague, whose lyrics are a mixture of morality tales and local folk stories. The opening 'S'Ihiams Eh' sets the mood with a throbbing riff from bass and keys veering into bursts of jazz-rock as Clague adds sometimes half-spoken vocals in a quietly angry story of greed with lyrics that translate as '*it's mine... Our house is bigger than your house because we're more important than you.*' Elsewhere, she shows off her clear, high vocals with minimal backing at the start of 'Crosh Vollan', and joins the band at the end of a rousing and jazzy R&B workout on 'Manannan', a track named after a sea god who is asked to '*bless us and our boats.*' The mood changes again with the gently haunting 'Tehi Tegi', where Aalin's voice is matched against trumpet and yet another sturdy riff, while on the finale 'Traen ni hOie' there's gently urgent backing for a night-time contemplation of the cosmos.

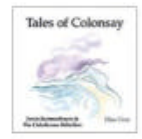
*ROBIN DENSELOW*

TRACK TO TRY *Tehi Tegi*

## The Ciderhouse Rebellion
And Even the Sheep Shall Dance / A Little Bit Slanted (with Molly Donnery) / Tales of Colonsay (with Jessie Summerhayes)

Under the Eaves Records

★★★½☆




I've said it before, and I'll say it again: The Ciderhouse Rebellion must be the most prolific outfit in folk music today. Are the duo of fiddler Adam Summerhayes and accordionist Murray Grainger trying to break some sort of record? And what is fuelling this incredible creative output? Cider? Whatever it is, they have beaten their own dizzying standards this time with the simultaneous release of three studio albums, each accompanied by a book. Firstly, the memorably named *And Even the Sheep Shall Dance*, which finds the duo in familiar territory, recording an instrumental response to global turmoil in the space of 24 hours, in a virtuosic and improvisational way. The accompanying graphic novel, penned by Summerhayes, mixes the pastoral (sheep and rabbits) with the apocalyptic (Putin and climate change). The second album, *A Little Bit Slanted*, reunites the duo with Irish singer Molly Donnery in a collection of Irish folk favourites from her childhood sung in English and Irish Gaelic. And the triptych is completed by another regular collaborator, Summerhayes' daughter, poet Jessie Summerhayes. *Tales of Colonsay* is a collection of poetry she wrote about a trip to the Scottish Hebridean island with her father. As always with The Ciderhouse Rebellion, a deep sense of place is ever-present, be it the sheep of the Derbyshire hillsides, the Galway pub session that sparked the collaboration with Donnery, or the open vistas of Colonsay and the deep connection between father and daughter. May the music never run dry.

*NATHANIEL HANDY*

TRACK TO TRY *Gannet Point*

## Jamie Dickson
Withershins

Jamie Dickson

★★★★½

*Withershins* is the debut solo album from Glastonbury-based guitarist Jamie Dickson. A homage to British folk guitar legends such as John Martyn and Bert Jansch, the album exudes powerful vulnerability and captures a delightfully rose-tinted vision of rural England. Dickson's understated yet elegant fingerstyle paints a soundscape of autumnal forests, wintry hills, springtime wildflower meadows and summer days that seem to last forever. Accompanying Dickson are pianist and flautist Stephanie Jean Ward (Ida Mae), violinist Aaron Catlow (Sheelanagig/Kit Hawes), vocalist Bethia Beadman (Hole) and bassist Nick Pini (Laura Marling/Tom Jones/Ethan Johns). There's an admirable absence of filler on *Withershins*. Roughly half the tracks float around the two-minute mark and each perfectly-clipped number seems to whet one's appetite for the next. Perhaps owing to Dickson's day job as the Editor-in-Chief of *Guitarist* magazine, the guitar tones achieved on *Withershins* are sublime. Warm, rich and bright like cinematic sun breaking through grey clouds, it's clear Dickson's expertise extends far beyond playing. While it's more retrospective than progressive, *Withershins* certainly achieves its goal of evoking the unvarnished spirit of British folk. If you love folk and appreciate talented players, this album is sure to impress.

*DAN HOBSON*

TRACK TO TRY *Swallowtail*

## Gordan
Gordan

Glitterbeat Records

★★★★½

The members of Gordan are Serbian singer Svetlana Spajić, Austrian percussionist Andi Stecher and German bassist and electronics specialist Guido Möbius. Spajić, a passionate collector of folk material which she uses to root her wilder experiments, has often focused on the darker side of societies, but this may be her darkest outing yet. Slack-skinned drums, clankings of shattered metal, bleak electronics and Spajić's angry, almost resentful voice create a world

Gordan

Christoph Voy

in which ‘Šara’, a well-known folk song about three shepherds trapped on a mountain becomes a desperate prayer for salvation from a forest fire – yet only one will receive it. A remembered home village in ‘Selo Moje’ (a Spajić original) seems to be destroyed, with ashes trickling from blackened rafters and house walls pockmarked by shellfire. Several songs, with strings of brief two-line aphorisms often sung uproariously at parties or dances, deal with the folkloric figure of Baraba – described by Spajić as a vagabond – and outcasts born out of constant wars in the region. A song of lost love popularised by Južni Vetar almost provides a lyrical respite, but the self-indulgent regrets of the original are transmuted into despair. It’s serious, grim, and a work of art.

*KIM BURTON*

TRACK TO TRY *Selo Moje*

TOP FOLK

## Landless
Lúireach

Glitterbeat Records

★★★★½

Landless are a female vocal quartet – Ruth Clinton, Sinéad Lynch, Méabh Meir, Lily Power – newly into their second decade together who share a glancing kinship with Lisa O’Neill’s recent *Top of the World* selection *All of This is Chance* (reviewed March 2023). *Lúireach*, the long-awaited follow-up to their 2018 debut *Bleaching Bones* finds the previously a cappella foursome deftly adding subterranean-disguised instrumental accompaniment to a mesmeric ten-track collation of traditional and new material. Translating from the Irish as a ‘protective breastplate’ or ‘hymn for protection,’ *Lúireach* positions Landless as kindred spirits to classical ensemble Anonymous 4 in the foregrounding of the often melancholic female experience. Two tracks are purely a cappella – a lilting but high-lying take on ‘Blackwaterside’ and a dark-hued ‘My Lagan Love’. Elsewhere, the addition of Ruth Clinton’s pipe organ and Cormac MacDiarmada’s strings on ‘Lúireach Bhrídé’ haloes a hymn to Brigid, ‘*goddess of poetry, healing and smithcraft.*’ Clinton’s clavichord punctuates Lynch’s new melody for the 17th-century poem ‘The Hag’ with porcelain delicacy, the plangent Slovak lament for a dead hussar, ‘Ej Husari’, floating forlornly on strings and Méabh Meir’s *shruti* box and singing bowls. Reunited with producer John ‘Spud’ Murphy, with *Lúireach*, Landless deliver a mesmeric listen that makes one hope for a shorter wait for their next offering.

*MICHAEL QUINN*

TRACK TO TRY *The Hag*

TOP OF THE WORLD TRACK 4

## North East Ska Jazz Orchestra
Sulla Rotta dei Venti

Brixton Records

★★★★½

North East Ska Jazz Orchestra are back with a powerhouse album to celebrate their tenth anniversary. Taking listeners on a journey from Mediterranean Europe to Jamaica via the Balkans and North Africa, *Sulla Rotta dei Venti* is packed with variation and summer vibes. Boasting bold brass hooks, floor-filling bass and beats, jazzy sax and keys, skank-inducing ska/reggae rhythms, groovy guitar and intoxicating accordion, the Italian 16-piece is on top form with album number four. The record kicks off with a hip-shaking beat before dropping into infectious call-and-response brass and accordion. Not shy of the top line or affording one another space to shine, opener ‘Piazza Della Libertà’ sets the tone with its sublime hooks and solos. A mid-album highlight is ‘Donna Di Chi’, which kicks off big band brass style and drops into the silky vocals of Rosa Mussin over uptempo ska before treating us to an expert jazz guitar solo. ‘Nimi Muzima’ is another highlight. It starts with ethereal vocals, layered and delayed dreamily, before Fat Freddy’s Drop-style instrumentation and a spellbinding flute solo take listeners to new heights. This album is a whole lotta fun and wonderfully uplifting. What’s not to like?

*DAN HOBSON*

TRACK TO TRY *Nimi Muzima*

## Malin Lewis
Halocline

Hudson Records

★★★★½

What a blessing that we’ve come into a time of celebration and experimentation for the humble Scottish smallpipes and border pipes. Though these bagpipes have always been used to open up a more intimate space for Scottish piping, new works from the likes of Brìghde Chaimbeul and now Malin Lewis show that they’re ripe for thoughtful experimenting as well. Some pipers, like Galicia’s Carme López, are delving into strange noise and trance worlds with the pipes. But for a piper like Lewis, whose new album *Halocline* is a soft, subtle revelation, the tradition remains a solid bedrock and the new sounds come from the quiet genius of how they’re interpreted. The word ‘halocline’ (a visible layer that forms between very salty and less salty water) is used here to show the liminality of Lewis’ life as a queer, trans artist. Living between genders, the idea of the microcosms of life that live between fresh and saltwater spoke to Lewis as a concept for the album. Most of the tunes are composed by Lewis, again working in a liminal space between improvisation and composition (to get the original idea of the tune). From the album title’s obscure vocabulary, to Lewis’ creation of a new form of bagpipe (a two-octave smallpipe developed from a 3D-printed model), *Halocline* is serious music, but played with a lovely lightness.

*DEVON LÉGER*

TRACK TO TRY *The Old Inn*

## Lúnasa
Live in Kyoto

Lúnasa Records

★★★★½

Serving up ten tracks of previously unrecorded material captured in situ before an audience, *Live in Kyoto* can’t be faulted for the boldness of its concept. Or for its execution. Recorded over three nights in late 2023 in the city’s TakuTaku club, it feels surprisingly intimate, appropriately enough for the scale of one of Japan’s most iconic ‘live houses’. No strangers to live recordings, this is the third such from Lúnasa after 2013’s collaboration with the RTÉ Concert Orchestra and *The Kinnitty Sessions* in 2004. With Mike McGrath’s masterly live engineering boasting studio-like clarity, the result is a satisfying, well-tailored programme delivered with the distinctive blending of tightly reciprocal but almost casually dispatched ensemble playing that has become the quintet’s signature. Opener ‘The Bull’s Track’ foregrounds Cillian Vallely’s songful *uilleann* pipes, stepping up a gear with ‘Red Ned’s’, a brace of swinging tunes for pipes and Kevin Crawford’s flute. Vallely’s writing is as central throughout as his playing, his own ‘The Rock Road’ a trio of expressively contrasted instrumentals, his tranquil flute duet with Crawford on ‘Man from Moyasta’ sitting atop the warm thermals of Ed Boyd’s guitar. There’s a becoming nod to wider Celtic affinities in the rhythmically buoyant Breton-accented ‘Bal Loudieg’ while album closer ‘Cabin the Woods’ is a jaunty ▸

Davide Degano

package of reels bringing an otherwise laid-back recital to an upbeat ending.

*MICHAEL QUINN*

TRACK TO TRY *Red Ned's*

## Ian Lynch
### All You Need is Death

Invada Records

★★★★½

*All You Need is Death* is the first cinematic soundtrack from Lankum's Ian Lynch. The film of the same name from director Paul Duane (*While You Live, Shine*) follows the story of two young song collectors who find themselves caught up in hallucinatory horror after recording an ancient Irish ballad. It's surprising that Lynch is only just now scoring his first film. His 2022 solo album *...And Take the Black Worm With Me* – released as One Leg One Eye – showcased the musician's talent for blending Irish traditional styles with the kind of creeping drones and claustrophobic ambience that lend drama and impending doom to any OST. Alongside unsettling instrumental atmospherics, Lynch has also come up with the old Irish for the song at the centre of the film (Duane gave him the English lyrics with instructions to translate them). It materialises through the tracklisting with increasing mania, sung softly on 'Feed the Swarm' before wrapping itself in the distortion and doom of Lynch's compositions and descending into a screaming deathmatch courtesy of Dublin band Malthusian on closer 'Old God Rising'. Sublime sequencing from engineer James Trevascus and Invada Records' own Redg Weeks further elevates this album from movie memorabilia to a stimulating standalone – a meta-anthology of traditional tunes that holds its listeners in thrall.

*OLIVIA CHEVES*

TRACK TO TRY *Old God Rising*

## Niamh Regan
### Come as You Are

Faction Records

★★★☆☆

OK, let's clear out the elephant in the room. Yes, Galway singer-songwriter Niamh Regan has named her second album *Come as You Are* and that's going to make most people of a certain age picture scruffy boys from Seattle. While there's plenty Nirvana-esque introspection here, it's a very listenable, intimate collection that wears its introspection lightly. Don't expect Irish folk music. This is commercial stuff, with slick production and something of the late-era Taylor Swift vulnerability to it. As always, it brings up that eternal question of where 'folk music' ends and 'pop music' begins. Can the music of the folk not be popular? Are they the same thing? Superficially, this is navel-gazing confessional singer-songwriting with a distinctly transatlantic flavour. Billed as '*folk-tinged*,' that tinge is fairly slight. Regan traverses solidly pop – even catchy pop – territory, with a full band sound that brings power and energy to the album. What really sets Regan apart are the neat and memorable melodic hooks and lyrics that beautifully pluck everyday speech and place it in song, such as the lovely '*Music doesn't do it for you*' on the '*Wilco-inspired*' single 'Music'.

*NATHANIEL HANDY*

TRACK TO TRY *Waves*

## Laura-Beth Salter & Ali Hutton
### From the Ground

FTG Records

★★★★½

Nature now can be attributed as a band member on albums and songs, and it should see royalties pour down like silver. There'll be a few royalties due with the release of this nature-soaked concept album from The Shee's Laura-Beth Salter and Treacherous Orchestra's Ali Hutton. It begins with the shimmering, tremulous airs of 'The 11th Hour' – an hour we must all feel familiar with, collectively – while the title-track is an epic call to action in the face of the hot, arid airs of climate emergency. 'Boreal' is a powering instrumental named after the great boreal forests of the world's north, while the nine-minute 'Broken Shores' is a more reflective instrumental, with beautiful details opening out of its wider vistas. Guest turns come from fiddler Patsy Reid, bassist Duncan Lyall and drummer Paul Jennings, as well as from the

# FOLK *ENGLAND, IRELAND, SCOTLAND & WALES*

*by Tim Cumming*

**Charlie Grey & Joseph Peach**'s ***A Breaking Sky*** (Braw Sailin' ★★★★) is a superb set of synesthetic, improvisational, immersive, submersive and beautifully evocative pieces on fiddle and piano, recorded live at '*Ardkinglas House on the shores of Loch Fyne in Argyll, renowned for its exquisite acoustics*.' It's a set that combines and fuses the richness of folk traditions with the open field of contemporary classical music. It's tough to choose a highlight among the 12 pieces here, though 'S Maise an Dòchas (Hope is Beautiful)', 'Ho Rò Mo Nighean Donn (My Brown Haired Girl)' and the luscious heartbreak that seems to be embedded in 'Lament for the Voice of Glengarry' are all stellar showstoppers.

**Good Habits** are a duo featuring Bonnie Schwarz on cello and vocals and accordionist Pete Shaw, with two albums behind them. On ***Quarter-Life*** (Good Habits ★★★), their indie-folk is leavened by classical and jazz influences, and they're joined by guests including Angeline Morrison on the spectral lullaby-like '360°' while the Lunatraktors ably assist Shaw in a superlative accordion-driven version of The Who's mighty 'Baba O'Riley'. Folk-classical quartet Vulva Voce join the duo on the Scandifolk-influenced 'Vinegar', while the Drystones' fiddler/composer Alex Garden plays on the glitchy tune set 'Space Buns / Hiccups', which features some high-speed duelling between fiddle and accordion. The Cure's 'Friday I'm in Love' is another highlight, while the closing 'Pointlessly' is a fond farewell and long goodbye.

**Kathryn Williams & Withered Hand** AKA Dan Wilson are touring their new album, ***Wilson Williams*** (One Little Independent Records ★★★★), its 11 songs recorded in Scotland with a crack supporting cast that includes Arab Strap's Graeme Smillie, Kris Drever, Belle & Sebastian's Chris Geddes and King Creosote's Kenny Anderson. From opening track, the catchy earworm that is 'Arrow', they trade vocals and verses, raise up some emotive choruses, and the music around them is assured with some solid riffs, as on 'Grace', while the likes of 'Elvis' highlight their harmony singing to excellent effect.

Kathryn Williams & Withered Hand

**John Patrick Elliott & Piers Lewin**'s ***Lost Songs of Scilly*** (Carbon Moon Records ★★★) is a concept album evoking the airs and graces of the Scilly Isles. Lewin is a native of tiny St Agnes, and over the years he and composer-songwriter John Patrick Elliot have put together songs and tunes that evoke Scillonian life and legend. There is no extant folk tradition in the Scillys, so these 13 songs and tunes are imaginary evocations, drawing on a range of styles and approaches, from finger-picking to electronica. 'Small Boats' addresses island life amid tempestuous seas, as well as the ongoing journeys of channel-crossing refugees, while a Simon Armitage poem, 'Scillonia', read by Mary Lowth, deftly sketches contemporary island life as the poet passes through.

The folk duo from South Brent on the edge of Dartmoor, **Harbottle & Jonas** follow up their 2021 pandemic set, *Beacon*, with ***Wild Goose*** (Harbottle & Jonas ★★★), recorded on the moor with Cornwall-based producer Josh Best-Shaw. Featuring eight songs, the duo sharing harmonium, cittern, concertina, piano, guitars and more between them, and a four-piece of guest players on trumpet, oboe, fiddle and drums. Songs range between the myth and mischief of 'Loki' to the title-track, a paean to their daughter, their often dreamy textures leavened by the album's acoustic textures. 'As I Walk into the Day' is one of the album's most tender pieces, evocative of a west-country dawn walk.

Ian West

forces of nature herself – '*whistling winds from Skye, crashing waves from Harris... sounds of the forest*' on Glasgow's outskirts – and snatches of spoken word from poet Jim Mackintosh, Gaelic singer Kim Carnie and others. It's an evocation of nature, but it's more than that too, an encapsulation of the immense tides of natural forces that sustain us – and that may come to condemn us.

*TIM CUMMING*

TRACK TO TRY *Broken Shores*

## Alessandro 'Asso' Stefana
Alessandro 'Asso' Stefana

Ipecac Records

★★★★½

Now here's an intriguing album. Alessandro 'Asso' Stefana is an impressive experimental guitarist and multi-instrumentalist from Italy who has built up an enviable following – he has collaborated with the great American jazz guitarist Bill Frisell and the executive producer on this set is PJ Harvey, a major fan of his "mysterious and beautiful music." Stefana's compositions are heavily influenced by American folk and blues, as well as psychedelia and ambient styles, and the majority of these solo tracks are elaborately multi-tracked instrumental pieces built around a tranquil, gently hypnotic bluesy theme, with a wash of effects provided by anything from pedal or lap steel guitars to organ and Marxophone zither. 'Out of the Blue', 'The Wandering Minstrel' and 'The House' would make glorious, gently epic film music, and could bring him a new and deserved cult following, while the 13-minute finale 'Continental Spazio' is mostly slow and drifting and would be ideal for a meditation session. Three tracks feature the voice of Roscoe Holcomb, the Appalachian singer who died in 1981 and who Bob Dylan famously described as having "a certain untamed sense of control." Holcomb's original a capella recordings of these songs, released on Smithsonian Folkways, are edgy and compelling, but here they are tamed by Stefana's pleasantly classy wash of guitar effects.

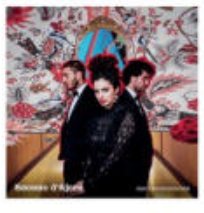
*ROBIN DENSELOW*

TRACK TO TRY *The House*

## Suonno d'Ajere
Nun V'Annammurate

Italian World Beat

★★★★½



Roberto Cavalli

The opening song of this album is really enticing. A delicate mandolin melody, accompanied by guitar introduces the voice of Irene Scarpato in 'Fotografia', a song newly composed by Scarpatia and the band re-imagining Naples after a 1980 earthquake. The name of the group translates as 'The Dream of Yesterday' and is also the title of a song by Neapolitan singer Pino Daniele. But the sound is fresh, although very Neapolitan thanks to the mandolin, Scarpato's expressive voice and the language. The group is just a trio – voice, mandolin and guitar, although there are various guests on the album. It was recorded in Auditorium Novecento, possibly the oldest recording studio in continental Europe. Apart from the opening, the songs unearth forgotten gems of Neapolitan song, a form which isn't internationally appreciated as much as *fado,* with which it has many similarities. There are melancholy songs about love, and the accompanying mandolin, with its delicate melodies between the vocals and sometimes simultaneous with them, is very like the sound of the Portuguese guitar. "A Gelusia' dates from 1934 and is deeply melancholic, perhaps accounting for the album's title which translates as 'Don't Fall in Love'. A 1944 song 'Ammore Busciardo' is sung by male voice Raiz from a soldiers's point of view about a woman who betrays him. And the wonderful French *chanson*-like 'Il Vesuvio a Parigi (feat Sorello Marinetti)' is about a Parisian man and Neapolitan woman who are trying unsuccessfully to persuade each other to live in their respective cities. Although we get tastes of Django Rheinhardt-style Gypsy jazz, Vesuvius in Paris seems a dangerous prospect. Naples has long been one of Europe's musical centres and Suonno d'Ajere, with the complicated and elusive love songs of *Nun V'Annammurate*, are one of its new jewels.

*SIMON BROUGHTON*

TRACK TO TRY *Fotografia*

# Songbook

## 'Moonshiner' with Alessandro 'Asso' Stefana

Multi-instrumentalist Alessandro 'Asso' Stefana, who hails from Brescia, Italy has had a career that's hard to describe, not least because he's often worked with musicians who can't be pinned down to genre themselves, with PJ Harvey, Vinicio Capossela, Calexico and Penguin Cafe among his many collaborators. With all of them he has been a facilitator of sorts, producing, engineering and more often than not, adding guitars or one of the other many stringed instruments or organs in his arsenal. He brings this approach on his eponymous debut solo album to a trio of songs originally recorded by Kentucky, US folk singer Roscoe Holcomb. "I'm a big fan of Roscoe Holcomb and Appalachian music," says Stefana. "And one day I discovered on a record from Smithsonian Folkways that there were a few tracks with Roscoe just singing a capella, so I started playing around. I tuned in all my instruments to the voice, because there was no harmonic reference, no regular pitch and a little world happened. I wanted to blend this roots voice with something more ethereal, something not really coming from folk music, and that's what I've done on my record." Stefana has added music to three recordings of Holcomb: 'Moonshiner', 'I Am a Man of Constant Sorrow' (both recorded in 1961) and 'Born and Raised in Covington' (1964).

These tracks form a second act on the album which begins with five instrumental tracks – with Stefana playing all the instruments except for a guest playing the fiddle – before Holcomb's voice enters. I ask Stefana if this was intentional. "Yes," he replies, "because I wanted you to have to enter in this world and then slowly find your path. Then [Holcomb's] voice appears and then the record finishes with this long track of ethereal music that slowly goes away. Roscoe worked in the mines, digging deep into the ground. Folk music is so connected to the ground, I wanted to oppose it with something coming from another space, from another world."

Of the three songs of Holcomb's that Stefana has recorded, each has a story: 'I Am a Man of Constant Sorrow' had a second (or perhaps third) life when it was re-recorded as the theme of the Coen Brothers' film *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*; 'Born and Raised in Covington' has made its way back and forth across the Atlantic, being regionalised and rewritten as 'Botany Bay' 'The Whitby Lad' and 'The Boston Burglar'; but let's hone in on 'Moonshiner', after all, Holcomb was a dab hand at making moonshine in his younger days. It has contentious origins as the first recorded versions of it both appear in the 1930s, Irish singer Delia Murphy recording it in 1939 and Kenneth Begley recording it for Alan and Elizabeth Lomax in the US in 1937. Curiously, the Irish version has a different melody, meter and key to the US version. "It's the beauty of these old ballads," says Stefana. "I like that ping pong all over the world and everyone [will] change some words and do their music on top of the words." The version that Stefana knew best was recorded by a more famous name. "I knew this song, Bob Dylan recorded it in the 60s. And if you compare the two versions, there's nothing the same, only the lyrics. I'm really happy with my version of 'Moonshiner' because it's something really new in a kind of way."

Discussing working with Holcomb's vocals Stefana says: "He was perfect on time, you know, I didn't change anything during the singing, I didn't edit, there was a sense of rhythm that really surprised me, it was almost perfect. Then the intonation, wow, really, really, really great. I'm happy to give a new life to his music."

*RUSS SLATER JOHNSON*

## Sväng
Svängo Nuevo

Galileo

★★★★½

Even after 20 years of playing together, the Finnish harmonica quartet Sväng still hold a unique voice in the landscape of Finnish music. This is their tenth album and it sees them galloping towards their next decade together with typical brilliance and energy. Finnish folk has always been at the heart of their music, alongside a great love of the impossibility of Bulgarian rhythms, the plaintiveness of bluegrass and a deeply humanitarian approach to the conflicts and sadness that prevail in history. From their very start in 2004, the group's own compositions have been inspired by the interaction of their brilliant playing: from the tiniest pocket-sized instrument to the brick-like bass harmonica, producing a sound which captivates audiences worldwide. *Svängo Nuevo* is a celebration of their own compositions and includes, for the first time, their new bass player and composer Tapani Varis, after the retirement of the very popular Paso Leino. From the Argentinian *milonga*, to Bulgarian folk dance, to a plaintive waltz, Finnish folk and a hint of American blues, a homage to nature and the song of the shepherd, Sväng not only show their thirst for discovery and making music in *Svango Nuevo*, but showcase, too, their ever-thrilling compositions, and their irrepressible wit.

*FIONA TALKINGTON*

TRACK TO TRY *Kanteleen Kisavirsi*

TOP OF THE WORLD
TRACK 7

## Richard Thompson
Ship to Shore

New West Records

★★★★½

It's been a fair few years since Thompson's previous set, 2018's excellent *13 Rivers*. Here it's more a case of sailing the seven seas, as *Ship to Shore* casts off into the troubled waters of the human condition with his regular trio of drummer Michael Jerome, bassist Taras Prodaniuk and guitarist Bobby Eichorn, joined by David Mansfield, veteran fiddler of Dylan's *Rolling Thunder* years, and Zara Phillips on harmony vocals. The angular, midtempo 'Freeze' sets off the voyage, though it's no bonny adventure, more heading for the mincer. '*Another day without a dream, without a hope, without a scheme.*' 'The Fear Never Leaves You' is torn from the same kind of cloth from which his more dystopian songs hang, spare in its musical parts, but tightly packed lyrically. 'Singapore Sadie' is a vivid character song, Mansfield's fiddle drawing back and forth, and trading solos with Thompson's limpid lead guitar. 'Maybe' is a strong, lean rocker, while the brilliant closing trio – the reflective 'Life's a Bloody Show', the ballad-like 'What's Left to Lose', with Phillips on harmony vocals, and the valedictory, Mansfield-drenched 'We Roll' – point the prow to deeper seas and adventures new. This ancient mariner's voyage is far from over yet.

*TIM CUMMING*

TRACK TO TRY *We Roll*

## Tartaglia Aneuro
Dove Voglio Stare

Full Heads Records

★★½☆☆

A popular act in the Neapolitan live scene for the past 12 years, Tartaglia Aneuro gather around singer and frontman Andrea Tartaglia and call themselves a local folk/crossover/*patchanka* act. Patchanka, in case you missed it, is a music style named after Mano Negra's 1988 debut album of the same name and mashes up traditional music, punk, reggae, ska, rock, hip-hop and whatever else comes in hand. So it is little surprise that *Dove Voglio Stare*, Tartaglia Aneuro's third album, has Vincenzo Rizzo (a habitué with Mano Negra and Manu Chao) sitting behind the mixing board and features Manu Chao's guitarist Lucky Salvadori showcasing his chops on 'Pazzià'. True to their self-definition as a group dedicated to crossovers, Tartaglia Aneuro collect all sorts of different elements and so, at their peak, we may find them going full-on Manu Chao rock-ska style in 'Le Pale Eoliche', hesitating between Italian pop, South African vocal songs and madness-tinged choruses on 'Tarantella Finale' and paying a visit to New Orleans swing on 'Carmela'. The major problem with Tartaglia Aneuro is that, unlike their hero Manu Chao, they occasionally concede to a pop music model a bit too sugary ('Ninna Nanna' and ''O Mare'). And unfortunately, the group only seem to really address their Italian roots in the excellent opening track 'Sent' Ancora'. *Dove Voglio Stare* is a fine record, but Tartaglia Aneuro's music would benefit if they dared to push themselves a little more.

*GONÇALO FROTA*

TRACK TO TRY *Sent' Ancora*

## Vedan Kolod
Birds

CPL-Music

★★★★½

A strange, compelling concept album from a family folk trio from Siberia who are deservedly well-known across Russia. Vedan Kolod are led by Tatiana Naryshkina and Valerii Naryshkin, who both sing, often providing edgy and eerie harmonies, and between play a variety of ancient instruments, some of them restored by Valerii, and including the *vargan* (a jaw harp), *gurli* (part of the zither family), Scythian harp and *svirel* flute along with drums, guitar, *kalimba* and wooden horn. Joined by Daryana Antipova and, for the first time, percussionist Alisa Naryshkina, they have recorded an album about birds because '*they are more common in Russian folk tradition than other animals.*' Naryshkina also cites them as "a symbol of hope [and] change," though there is a bleak edge to the non-traditional songs written by Valerii. The opening 'Peahen' sets the mood, with Tatiana's strident, attacking vocals matched against intense acoustic backing. Valerii takes the lead on another traditional song, 'The Cuckoo', backed by twanging jaw harp, and the duo provide thrilling harmony work on 'Aviatrix', Valerii's story of a battle between a falcon and a snake. On the atmospheric title-track, he switches from spoken passages to growled echoes of throat-singing as he tells a story of migrating birds looking down on armies fighting below, while those who are going to die look up at the sky.

*ROBIN DENSELOW*

TRACK TO TRY *Birds*

David Kaptein

# THE ZAWOSE QUEENS

## the zawose queens **live 2024**

22/06 **BRIGHTON** UK
Africa Night Fever

23/06 **LIVERPOOL** UK
Africa Oyé Festival

29/06 **GLASTONBURY** UK
Green Fields Stage

29/06 **GLASTONBURY** UK
Croissant Neuf Stage

30/06 **GLASTONBURY** UK
Greenpeace Stage

02/07 **LAUSANNE** CH
Festival de la Cité

05/07 **BRISTOL** UK
Wake The Tiger

06/07 **GOTHENBERG** SE
Clandestino Festival

07/07 **MALMO** SE
Malmo Sommerscen

11/07 **MANCHESTER** UK
Ramona

13/07 **CORNWALL** UK
Tropical Pressure Festival

16/07 **LONDON** UK
Dalston Eastern Curve Garden

19/07 **DANZIG** PL
Globaltica

26/07 **WILTSHIRE** UK
WOMAD

27/07 **THISTED** DK
Alive Festival

03/08 **COPENHAGEN** DK
Badesøen Festival

debut album **Maisha** out now on REALWORLD

# THE JOY

**The breakout a capella band from South Africa**
**As seen on 'Later... with Jools Holland' and Coachella (special guests with Doja Cat)**
**Debut album 'The Joy' - recorded and captured on film in one take**
**Out June 21st on Transgressive**

Get 15% discount with code THEJOY15 from the band's official store

Transgressive · Love You Up · Black Major

# ANA EGGE

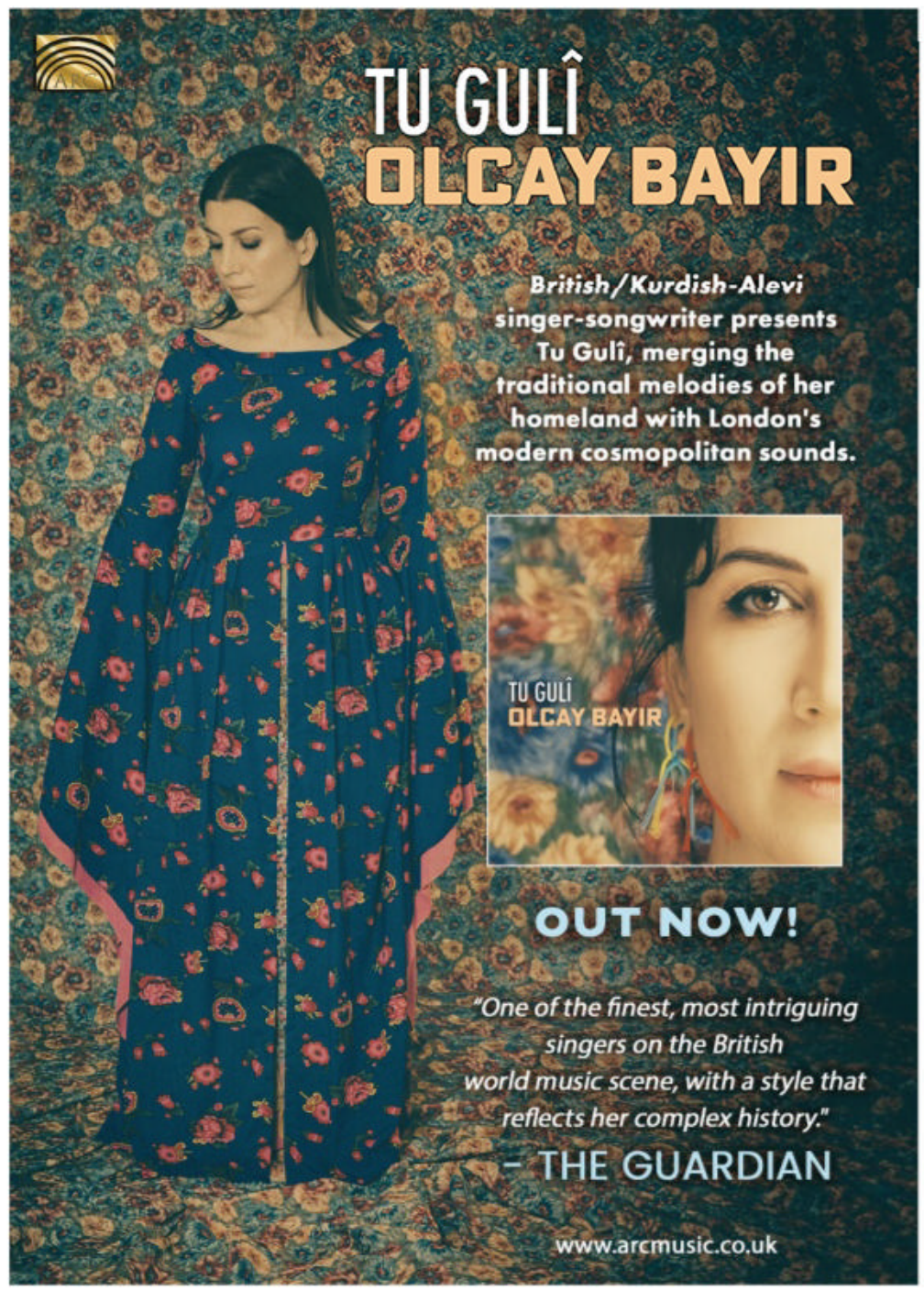
## SHARING IN THE SPIRIT

We're all just looking for a reason to fall in love again. Maybe that's with a person, a cause, ourselves, the world in general — or even just a new album. Ana Egge makes it all easy to do on her 13th album, ***Sharing in the Spirit***. Egge has been a striking songwriter for some time — on ***Sharing in the Spirit***, she and producer Lorenzo Wolff have crafted intentional soundscapes that make every song a gem. — ***No Depression***

proper music distribution

**OUT NOW**

STORYSOUND RECORDS



Rahman Mammadli

## Rəhman Məmmədli
### Azerbaijani Gitara, Vol 2
Bongo Joe Records

★★★★★

Bongo Joe Records' first foray into *gitara* music from Azerbaijan (the aptly-titled *Azerbaijani Gitara* by Rüstem Quliyev, released in 2020) was a revelation. Now we get *Vol 2*, this time a compilation of the work of Rahman Mammadli… and cor, it's just as good. The key ingredient in gitara is the electric guitar – specifically Jolana guitars from Czechoslovakia, which Azeri musicians realised was a perfect fit for creating an exciting modern blend of folk and classical styles, as well as influences from East and West. Mammadli's speciality is in pointing gitara towards classical *mugham*, transforming emotional, solemn art music into a wild rollercoaster of guitar wizardry accompanied by synths, programmed drums and the occasional accordion. This album's opener, 'Qoçeli', is the perfect example. You get about one second of synth drone to tune in and prepare for what's coming before Mammadli comes roaring in, guitar already on full-distortion, creating a beautiful, unmetred improvisation; later, Casio beats and frame drum come in, and it just turns up to the next notch again. Like Quliyev, Mammadli's style shows clear influence from the iconic *tar* in the way he picks the strings and crafts his runs, and in the minute adjustments he makes within each note, bending the strings freely and subtly, getting access to the most ecstatic of microtones. But what is most astonishing is the sheer vocality that he gets out of his guitar. At times there is an uncanny sense that the sounds he makes are literally that of a master singer, even affecting techniques such as *zangula*, a sort of chromatic yodelling so distinctive of mugham. The programmed backing tracks and beats sometimes get a bit wearing, but they're never allowed to linger on their own for long before they are inevitably and completely overshadowed by guitar. It's that good. Two volumes into the *Azerbaijani Gitara* series, and it's all gold. I wonder how many more master musicians, how many treasure troves of gitara are still waiting to grace our ears? I can't wait to hear more.

*JIM HICKSON*

TRACK TO TRY *Qoçali*

## Jorga Mesfin
### The Kindest One
Muzikawi

★★★☆☆

Jorga Mesfin is a comparatively new kid on the Ethio-jazz block. The Ethiopian saxophonist also happens to be Mulatu Astatke's protégé. Although this is his debut album, he began his professional career at 17, founded the group Wudasse and won an award for his soundtrack to the film, *Teza*. Influenced by John Coltrane among others, his first outing begins with 'Thanksgiving': pure mid-period Coltrane, with a long piano solo culminating in the interjections of Mesfin's soprano sax. The solo accordion of 'The Portal' then segues into 'Longing', a ruminative number played on soprano again and accompanied by subliminal percussion, full of minor-pentatonic melancholy. 'Pilgrimage' is another meditative minimalist piece, built around electric bass, hand drums and handclaps. The title-track is either low-key spiritual jazz or noodling, depending on your taste. On 'Tizita', Mesfin gives the tenor sax its sole outing, supported by trumpet, hand drum and organ swells. The final two tracks, 'Spring Water' and 'Ye Abay Gizo', further underline the taste, discretion and prevalent sense of yearning at work on an album that simmers nicely without ever quite finding its way or coming to the boil.

*MARK SAMPSON*

TRACK TO TRY *Longing*

## Ziad Rahbani
### Amrak Seedna & Abtal Wa Harameyah
WeWantSounds

★★★★½

Ziad Rahbani is the son of Lebanese icon Fairuz and famed composer Assi Rahbani and a living legend in Lebanon, where he became a cult hero in the 80s with a soundtrack album that mixed Arabic music with funk, boogie and jazz fusion to fabulous, dizzying effect. This is that album, recorded in 1987 at By-Pass Studio in Beirut, where Rahbani – a playwright and activist as well as a pianist, multi-instrumentalist and producer – worked on tracks including the disco-tastic 12" 'Abu Ali' and projects led by his mother. Previously only ever released in Lebanon, then in the middle of a fraught civil war, crate diggers, DJs and the excellent WeWantSounds label are to thank for the reissue of the album originally conceived as a soundtrack to two stage plays by Antoine Kerbaj, whose respective narratives' content and pace are hinted at via a combination of instrumentals, interludes and guest-sung songs with catchy melodies, jazzy flair and oh-so-funky modern arrangements. Variations on Monty Norman's original 'James Bond Theme' pepper the latter soundtrack; Rahbani plays Fender Rhodes and flute across the lovely 'Masshad Al Hob', whose recurring melody is reworked on 'Slow'; *oud* and percussion add traditional welly to arrangements on 'Hake Ad Ma Baddak Fee'. Thoughtful liner notes by Mario Choueiry from Institute du Monde Arab in Paris reinforce and celebrate the agency of Ziad Rahbani's *Amrak Seedna & Abtal Wa Harameyah*.

*JANE CORNWELL*

TRACK TO TRY *Hake Ad Ma Baddak Fee*

Ziad Rahbani

Sitara Ibrahimbayli; Ziad Rahbani

TOP OF THE WORLD TRACK 3

## Kiran Ahluwalia
Comfort Food

Six Degrees Records

★★★★☆

Indo-Canadian singer Kiran Ahluwalia has flown somewhat under the radar in Europe, winning *Songlines*' 2009 Best Newcomer award only after her fourth album. Her eighth album, *Comfort Food*, is further evidence of what we have been missing out on. The record supplies a confident fusion of the *ghazal* vocal tradition and Punjabi folk with everything from Saharan desert blues to jazz and protest rock. Despite the album's title, Ahluwalia is unafraid to serve us challenging dishes. Many of the tracks mourn division, particularly in an India dominated by nationalist politics. 'Tum Dekhoge' is a setting of a poem by Hussain Haidry, which he wrote after heavy-handed policing of a 2019-20 protest advocating for Indian muslims. The piece builds from an isolated vocal, which is joined by a mournful acoustic guitar. The music's bite deepens as the lyrical bitterness intensifies. '*Hindustan will just be a word, which will be scared, cowardly hell,*' Ahluwalia sings (in Hindu-Urdu) as the piece erupts into a hectic guitar solo. On 'Jaane Jahan' Ahluwalia uses her own words to amplify Haidry's as organ squeals and percussive fusillades communicate turmoil. She urges that '*We're part of one nation, bound by one wound.*' The arrangements convey a weariness with division that recalls the tradition of protest rock associated with North American counterculture in the late 1960s. 'Tum Dekhoge''s slow burning intensity has something in common with 'For What It's Worth' by Buffalo Springfield, also written after police clashes with protestors. More comforting fare is offered by playful love song 'Pancake', which begins with a stuttering guitar riff similar to Panjabi MC's global mega hit 'Mundian to Bach Ke'. The piece fizzes with joy through rousing chord changes and a riotous organ solo. It is accompanied online by an appropriately life-affirming music video. The inspiration for the song is Ahluwalia's partner Rez Abbasi, a noted jazz guitarist who appears on and produced *Comfort Food*. 'Dil' is another track that examines affairs of the heart, deploying a slinky shuffle propelled by fluttering accordion and driving drums. '*I'm casting aside fear and shame. Let neighbours gossip,*' sings Ahluwalia as she resolves to discard the double standards governing female desire. 'Dil' shows how seemingly personal themes of love and desire are united with *Comfort Food*'s political and social commentary. For a woman to openly express desire transgresses cultural norms, which speaks to wider inequalities. Similarly, whether they would wish it or not, Indian-born Ahluwalia's romance with Pakistani-born Abbasi makes a unifying statement that has political overtones. Ahluwalia has chosen to embrace and express these tensions on record, to moving effect.

*LIAM IZOD*

**TRACK TO TRY** *Pancake*

## Q&A

### Kiran Ahluwalia

**This is your first album since 2018. Did you feel you had more to say after the break?**
World events spiralled in such a way that I did feel compelled to write about them. The album has a strong focus on protest songs – I'm lamenting the rise of ethnic nationalism across the globe and especially in India.

**Can you talk about your instrumentation choices and collaborators?**
My guitarist (and husband) Rez Abbasi has been instrumental in bringing a more progressive sensibility to my music. I want to align Indian rhythms with a contemporary Western feel so I compose songs with drum kit in mind as well as *tabla*. A decade ago, when I lost my harmonium player to cancer, I chose to fill that sonic space with accordion.

**The album's called *Comfort Food*. How do you balance the heavy themes with the lighter?**
The personal edges into the political in this album. Life is sadness, angst, joy and, through my music, I embrace it all. The name *Comfort Food* directly relates to the song 'Pancake', but writing about serious issues such as our political tribalism worldwide actually helped me release a lot of angst and in that sense the process of creation was my 'comfort food'.

Diaspora Arts Ccollection; George Whiteside

# Asia & Pacific REVIEWS

## Sam Anning
Earthen

Earshift Music

★★★★½

Anning is an Australian bassist-composer who studied in New York, before performing alongside such legendary jazz players as saxophonist Joe Lovano and fellow bassist Charlie Haden. Returning to Melbourne in 2015, the last decade has seen award-winning Anning regularly lead his own groups, and become a much sought-after player for many ensembles, That included a three-year stint backing the iconic Australian Aboriginal singer-songwriter Archie Roach, prior to his passing in 2022. Dedicated to Archie, this release – Anning's third with a septet – finds him borrowing a couple of Roach's melody lines, but it's mainly a reflective and well-composed jazz-based excursion. Encouraging his cohorts to share the spotlight, the most prominent players are veteran tenor saxophonist Julien Wilson on 'Transitive States', alto player Carl Mackey ('Moonland') and the emotive pianist Andrea Keller ('Kicking, Not Screaming'). And the magnificent, slow-building 'Eleventy Million (for Auggie Bruten)' features some truly remarkable and delicate playing from trumpeter Mat Jodrell. Anning's basslines are consistently creative, but it's his intricate compositions, as well as his subtle production touch, which really shine. A worthy tribute to the memory of Archie Roach.

*SETH JORDAN*

TRACK TO TRY ***Eleventy Million (for Auggie Bruten) (feat Mat Jodrell)***

## Kyab Yul-Sa
Murmures d'Himalaya

Nangma Productions

★★★★½

This is an excellent release by a trio consisting of Lobsang Chonzor, a Tibetan singer born in exile and *dranyen* lute and *gyumang* hammered dulcimer player, Margaux Liénard on Norwegian *Hardanger d'amore* fiddle and *bouzouki* and Julien Lahaye a percussionist who mainly plays the Persian/Iranian *tombak* goblet drum. 'Gangkar', the opener, is a Tibetan traditional song that praises the prosperity of the Land of Snows. A jaunty lively rhythm realised on the Tibetan lute and bright singing set the tone. The fiddle and drum arrangement flows naturally in harmony with the sentiment of the piece. The trio have worked hard in matching the sonic worlds of the different instruments and styles without compromising the individual strengths and characters of the traditions they come from. 'Elvegard' has a 'European' contemporary folk fiddle instrumental feel with alternating time signatures. 'Mantra' starts with Lobsang Chonzor's lone voice chanting the sacred words, a Hardanger drone and drum groove slip in which gradually morph into a dance-like fiddle tune moving onto loud keening vocals and more complex rhythms to a climatic end. Lobsang Chonzor also trained in Tibetan Opera and 'Khapshay', '*a Tibetan opera ritual song… to cleanse the stage*' is a fine example of his powerful voice. The performers on *Murmures d'Himalaya* are at the height of their game.

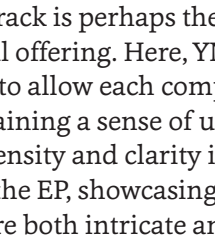
*MICHAEL ORMISTON*

TRACK TO TRY *Mantra*

## Marewrew
Ukouk

Pingipung

★★★★½



*Ukouk* (round-singing) celebrates over a decade of Marewrew's entrancing Ainu songs, with *tonkori* collaboration from Oki Kano on several tracks. Existing fans of Marewrew will have heard many of the album's tracks before, but Kassian Troyer's remastering provides a new clarity, depth and invigoration to Marewrew's voices. Tracks such as 'Sonkayno – Game Song' and 'Sikata Kuykuy – Snow Falling From a Tree' exemplify how the deceptively simple canons of the *upopo* tradition can create an incredibly rich sonic experience. What begins as a short phrase, builds, layer by layer, into

# SPICE RACK *EXPLORING MUSIC FROM SOUTH ASIA AND ITS DIASPORA*

*by Dhruva Balram*

YNZN refuses to be boxed into conventional genres. Since 2020, the Nepalese producer has shown through his releases that he can skip across genres nimbly, showcasing his peerlessness in South Asia. Having featured on radio shows, appeared on multiple compilations and released several singles and two stand-out EPs as YNZN.P in *how about that* and *Couldn't Dance to Save My Life*, there is no question that YNZN is one of the most exciting electronic music producers in the region.

Those first two EPs were sublime. They're both an agile blend of genres, moving across house, bass and electro with aplomb; vocal loops chopped up atop skittish drum rolls and bass-heavy, anthemic beats. *Couldn't Dance to Save My Life* is more upbeat and cheerful, reminiscent of dance floors with its club-ready tunes, while the production on *how about that* leans towards mellow contemplation. But, it's the latest, a four-track EP titled *Body Rock* (released under the simplified YNZN) that has stood out significantly. Released on German duo Modeselektor's SSPB label, the EP is a testament to his significant evolution, showcasing his mastery of percussive intricacies and minimalist sound design.

The EP opens with 'Smoke and Mirrors', a track that sets the tone with its use of looped samples from the Nepalese folk song 'Jhim Jhim Saanu'. The restless, UK garage-style basslines create a disorienting yet captivating atmosphere that lasts nearly five minutes. This track exemplifies YNZN's talent for blending traditional sounds with contemporary electronic music, making it both a homage to his heritage and a forward-thinking club track.

For any aspiring producers, 'Headshot' is a masterclass in production. The song relies on tuned drums to provide subtle hints of harmony, in turn creating an absolute club belter. With ceiling-threatening rhythms, this isn't for the faint-hearted. The track highlights how to create tension, to make it feel like the listener is continually walking on a tightrope. YNZN does this by adding so much textural depth that the bottom continually falls out.

With its propulsive drums, 'Deuce' offers a contrast. Alongside a collage of twitchy synths and bleeps, YNZN stitches elements together into a fiery, frenetic beat that possesses a coiled energy, like it would collapse in on itself under intense inspection. It's perfect for both the sunrise walk home and the morning run.

The title-track is perhaps the EP's most experimental offering. Here, YNZN manages to create space to allow each component to breathe while maintaining a sense of urgency. This balance of density and clarity is a recurring theme throughout the EP, showcasing his ability to create tracks that are both intricate and accessible.

Born Prasidha Singh Yonzon, YNZN started producing at the end of 2016. Having just graduated from his Master's programme, the Kathmandu-based artist was ready to start working full-time but felt very disconnected from himself and was unhappy for nearly a year. Collaborating with and learning from fellow Nepalese musicians like Dipsoman (Vinayak Tamang), Enhancify (Rishavh Shrestha) and Ranzen Jha, YNZN has now carved a path of his own.

His latest work also reflects the broader trends in Kathmandu's underground music scene. As one of the leading lights in this tight-knit community of DJs and producers, YNZN has played a crucial role in transforming Kathmandu into an incubator for wild, forward-thinking sounds. The city's scene has grown from DIY parties to gaining critical global acclaim. Alongside artists like Foeseal, Amazumi and many others, YNZN has established himself as a key figure in the scene, but also as one of the most exciting producers in South Asia.

Ratna Sambhav

a complex and all-enveloping bubble of song which seems imbued with a feeling of perpetual motion. Marewrew's melodies swoop and soar, blending smoothly, yet their individual voices are still distinctive, contributing additional textural interest. 'Orouro Roahun – Lullaby', brings a different dynamic. The track, in contrast with the rest of the album, features a single soft voice over a repetitive tonkori accompaniment. The tonkori's inclusion is a nice addition and adds textural and harmonic interest. 'Yaykatekara – Wedding Song' and 'Kanerenren – Bear Ceremony Song', also with voice and tonkori, see the addition of drums which bring a real groove – a true contemporary take on a living musical tradition.

*GEORGETTE NUMMELIN*

TRACK TO TRY *Pon Repun Kamuy – Little Orca Sea God*

## Rohingya Refugees
### Once We Had a Home

Toy Gun Murder

★★★☆☆

The Rohingya people are among the most persecuted on the planet. In 1982, they were driven from their ancestral homes by the Myanmar government. Today, around one million Rohingya live in the world's biggest refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Producer Ian Brennan led a team into the camp, not an easy feat given the violence and harsh living conditions there. They set about recording musicians using a mandolin and a mop-bucket drum; women were contacted as well but declined to perform. The refugees sing about two topics: the horror and impact of the genocide that drove them to the camp, and love songs. These are often harrowing and they are sung with great passion. The song titles reveal terrors, such as 'My Body Aches for Home' and 'The Soldiers Burned Our Mosque (They Stole Our Souls)' and bittersweet love as on 'I Want To Marry Amira, from the Camp (If I Cannot, I'll Hang Myself)'. The final song, the saddest of all, is 'My Family Prays For Us to Come Home (Here We Have No Life At All)'.

*JOHN CLEWLEY*

TRACK TO TRY *We are Stuck Here in the Camps*

## Bagus Shidqi
### Digital Indigenous 6: Njondhil Njondhal

1000Herz Records

★★★★☆

Javan *gamelan* ensembles are usually huge affairs, with ranks of musicians playing gongs and percussion instruments. Indonesian musician and composer Bagus Shidqi somehow manages to recreate the mesmerising sounds of gamelan virtually in his studio. His reputation for blending traditional music with digital sounds is on show on this album, which is loosely based on the Jathilan ritual in which dancers take on the appearance of horses to channel spirits. It kicks off with a typical gamelan intro, 'Pambuko (Opening)', underlining Shidqi's commitment to honouring the music's folk roots as he takes it to new destinations. This segues into the song that features Jathilan and then onto a standout, 'Laku Urip (Live a Life)', stressing unity and gratitude. In contrast to these are love songs like the bittersweet 'Mblenjani Janji (Broken Promise)', which encourages everyone to let go of broken promises, to move on and lead a better life.

*JOHN CLEWLEY*

TRACK TO TRY *Mblenjani Janji (Broken Promises)*

## Varijashree Venugopal
### Vari

GroundUP Music

★★★★★

Innovation born of mastery of tradition is a central tenet of GroundUP, the record label founded by Michael League. And nowhere is this better exemplified on their roster than by *Vari*, the debut from prodigiously talented Carnatic singer/flautist Varijashree Venugopal, who as a toddler could allegedly recognise over 100 Carnatic *ragas*, and was performing in concert aged four. The flawlessness of her vocals – with their precise melody and rhythm and wide-ranging emotional expression – astound from the off, framed by a Carnatic ensemble on violin, keys, *tambura* drone and percussion instruments including *mridangam*, with League playing bass and a bass synth that wheel and soar. Still in her early 30s, Bangalore-born Venugopal has previously collaborated with the musically adventurous likes of Bobby McFerrin, and it's her willingness to venture outside the classical Carnatic form, pulling in threads from other musics, improvising even more, that gives *Vari* its wings. Any barrier leaping is elegantly done; League, co-producing with percussionist Pramath Kiran, adds impressionistic effects enhancing Venugopal's unhurried, perfectly pitched vocals. Opener 'Dream' is float-on-a-cloud gorgeous, a vulnerable, undulating flow of ascending and descending scales; 'Harivaa Jhari' is a sure-fire hit with clever tempo changes and impassioned delivery that warrants repeated listening.

*JANE CORNWELL*

TRACK TO TRY *Harivaa Jhari*



lighthouse
Arts & Entertainment | Poole

FRI 25 OCTOBER

**Afro Celt Sound System**

Afro Celt Sound System are among the pioneers of the contemporary world music scene. Their ground-breaking fusion of African, Gaelic and Bhangra influenced sounds has won the hearts and minds of audiences since the group's beginnings over 25 years ago.

**Time** 7.30pm | **Concert Hall**

FRI 13 DECEMBER

**Soothsayers**

Born out of London's melting pot of cultures and music, Soothsayers burst onto the music scene with their stunning Afrobeat-infused debut album Lost City. Ten albums later they're still pushing musical boundaries to huge acclaim and are all set for a Studio Jazz Christmas Party right here in Poole!

**Time** 8pm | **The Sherling Studio**

Different every day

TOP OF THE WORLD TRACK 9

## Ajate
Dala Toni

180g

★★★★½

*Dala Toni* is the third album to be released by the Japanese-Afrobeat fusion collective Ajate. Led since 2009 by Junichiro 'John' Imaeda, Ajate's unique '*Afrobayashi*' sound is a truly hybrid delight. On the surface, it is upbeat and fun. Probe a bit deeper, and it illuminates the profound sonic similarities between two geographically distant cultures, the dance music of Accra's vibrant nightlife and the traditional sounds of Japanese Ohayashi ancestral festivals. The opening track 'Waya Yawa' launches straight into the classic sounds of Afrobeat: upbeat drums, bright electric guitars, polyrhythmic percussion, funky basslines. The presence of Japanese vocals in this characteristically West African soundscape brings a surprising and fresh element. These vocals reach a climax on the fourth track 'Kopi Lakanka' which features impassioned call-and-response between male soloist and chorus. You need not speak Japanese to understand the powerful message of human interconnectedness. A fascinating array of custom-made instruments are on display. The track 'Iduchihemo' opens with a *jaate*, a West-African style *balafon*-xylophone crafted by Imaeda from Japanese bamboo. A Malian style *ngoni* with Japanese *shamisen* strings can also be heard in accompaniment throughout. There is nothing superficial about this musical fusion – it is a highly innovative and powerful cultural dialogue.

*TOM SPARGO*

TRACK TO TRY *Waya Yawa*

## Layale Chaker & Sarafand
Radio Afloat

In a Circle Records

★★★½☆

Layale Chaker is a Lebanese violinist and composer whose music draws rich inspiration from contemporary classical music, jazz improvisation and traditional Arabic forms. *Radio Afloat* is the second album recorded with her Sarafand chamber jazz quintet, and this new project certainly builds upon the inventive sounds pioneered on her 2019 *Inner Rhyme* (a *Top of the World* in April of that year). The album is built around the slightly surreal concept of '*a radio lost at sea*,' a philosophical undercurrent which Chaker uses to contemplate various themes: the natural environment, human agency, the intertwined destiny of humanity. Pianist Phillip Golub, bassist Sam Minaie and drummer John Hadfield make up the rhythm section and provide jazz-infused accompaniment. Nimble ride cymbals and walking basslines underpin tracks such as 'Khab Nisan' and 'Sketch – Unraveled', and Golub's ingenious use of a microtonal keyboard elevates these jazzier moments with spicy intervals and wonky intonations. Chaker is joined by cellist Jake Charkey, and a distinctly Arabic flavour emerges from their chromatic melodies and microtonal improvisations on tracks such as 'Southern Sky' and the two-part 'Anatomie of Titus'. For listeners keen to hear more of the classical dimensions of Chaker's music, In a Circle Records is simultaneously releasing a sister record from Chaker and the string quartet ETHEL, titled *Vigil*.

*TOM SPARGO*

TRACK TO TRY *Anatomie of Titus – I – Fall of Rome*

## Eve Crazy & Mar Yo
New Stories

Eve Crazy & Mar Yo

★★★½☆

This duo recording presents an intriguing clash of cultures. Eve Crazy is a Senegalese female rapper perhaps best-known as a member of hip-hop collective Gënji; Mar Yo is a Finnish musician and singer whose work is based around her playing of the *kantele*, a zither-like stringed instrument. Under her birthname of Marjo Smolander she's previously released an album, 2021's *Cosmologies*. Formed in Dakar, Senegal in 2021, the duo's music tends to work best when Smolander's kantele playing and Finno-Ugric folk vocal aesthetics provide a light and airy foil to Eve Crazy's rapping. They provide a dreamlike and atmospheric backing to Eve Crazy's strident flows on tracks like 'Violences' and 'Jigéen ñi', a track previously released as a single and which celebrates global female togetherness. Elsewhere 'Immortel' finds Smolander's Finnish folk singing take centre stage while 'Sama Xarit' and 'SP-Party' find the pair introducing elements of techno-pop to their music with winning results.

*PAUL BOWLER*

TRACK TO TRY *Jigéen ñi*

Gregory Rubenstein

## Lass
Passeport

Chapter Two Records / Wagram Music

★★★☆☆

From the moment Lassana Sané, aka Lass, gently launches into the opening track 'Massamba', the listener is aware of the unique timbre of his vocals. And the 11 songs in his second album allow the Senegalese artist the space to explore an admirable range and elasticity. Lass has patiently built up his musical career since he lit upon Lyon over 15 years ago, determined to forge a career around vocals moulded in his suburb near Dakar. Lass' meeting with the French electronic duo Synapson helped propel his first hit, their single, 'Souba', in 2018 shortly followed by his eponymous first album in 2022. Now, he brings out an album with a luscious sound and production, including an ambitious AI-guided video for the title-track. The problem with *Passeport* is what surrounds Lass' seductive vocals: a repetitive rhythm that makes it a dance-y but limited Afropop release. It's almost too slick and lacks the musical innovation and pugnacity to accompany this raw talent. Yes, Lass has a voice, unquestionably. We look forward to him forging his own musical identity to join his vocal heroes which include Ismaël Lô and Omar Pene.

*DANIEL BROWN*

TRACK TO TRY *Selou*

## New Regency Orchestra
New Regency Orchestra

Mr Bongo

★★★★☆

Brainchild of Lex Blondin, Church of Sound and Total Refreshment Centre co-founder, New Regency Orchestra is an 18-piece Afro-Cuban big band inspired by 1950s New York. The band unites some of the London jazz and Latin scene's best players, including Eliane Correa as bandleader – and it sounds like it. A particular favourite is salsa track 'Labasta Llego', with its vintage sound and groovy vocal melody and intense horn lines underpinned by *timbales*. Apart from 'Papa Boco', the rest of the 12 tracks are big instrumental numbers, each drawing on a different facet of the band's Latin influences, including fresh spins on tunes by Tito Puente and René Hernandez among others. Lex Blondin lends his hand to 'Mambo Rama (Lex Blondin Rework)', which is built around a heavy horn-stab backbeat. The press notes state, '*Our intention is to be both respectful to the innovators and inventors of this incredible music… but also to add something special from London, where the city's new jazz scene connects with its Latin… influences.*' This intention definitely rings clear in the music, I loved hearing how this group of London-based musicians have created a sound that's vintage and authentic, but equally innovative and 'London' in it's sonority.

*CHARLOTTE ALGAR*

TRACK TO TRY *Labasta Llego*

## Ruttusound
Tropikantele

Eclipse Music

★★★☆☆

Chilling with a piña colada after a sauna? That might be the vibe as Finland's national instrument, the *kantele*, fuses with Caribbean and Latin rhythms and a sprinkling of electronic fairy dust in *Tropikantele*. The album's single 'Oso' (Bear) starts out with strums on the kantele, but one-man-band Sami Sammalkallio (appearing here under the moniker of Ruttusound) mostly plucks the zither-like instrument in its 35, 36 and 39-string versions, along with playing percussion and drums. His focus is not so much melody as laidback grooves and intriguing experiments in layered, cross-cultural rhythms – think a 2020s exotica update of The Meters' New Orleans funk or a stripped-down, wordless version of Manu Chao. At times, his kantele sounds like an Okinawan *koto* or a Malian *kora*, backed up with handclaps, dubby drum bursts, steel pans and exotic percussion. 'Picamaderos Negro' (Black Woodpecker) starts out as shuffling *cumbia* before moving into downtempo techno, then something more psychedelic and dubwise. All the while, Sammalkallio manages to steer clear of gimmickry. While there's nothing profound or ground-breaking in *Tropikantele*, tracks like 'Doninha' (Weasel) with its tasty drum break would make a cheerful addition to any summer playlist. And don't miss the video for 'Oso', with fabulous archival footage of breakdancers at a Karelian wedding in 1921.

*WIF STENGER*

TRACK TO TRY *Doninha*

TOP OF THE WORLD TRACK 8

## Hezron Chetty
I am Death, I am Breath, I am Life

Mad Violinist Productions

★★★★☆

Hezron Chetty is a South African violinist who has made a career out of pushing the boundaries of the instrument. Not satisfied with sticking to the classical or jazz worlds, he's explored countless genres and his latest album is an introspective gem that weaves a tapestry of emotional depth and creativity. *I am Death, I am Breath, I am Life* is a multimedia project, featuring a companion book by the same title that offers autobiographical context for each track. The project was born from a period of his life '*marked by divorce, the death of his father and homelessness.*' Opener 'Composure' features a gentle pizzicato ostinato that is at odds with the long, plaintive violin and cello lines that weave in and out of each other. In the corresponding chapter of the book, Chetty reflects on the necessity of maintaining composure amid life's unexpected challenges, inspired by the story of his divorce. The mood morphs subtly as the tracks progress: a feeling of angst pervades 'Mountain' (inspired by Chetty's return to South Africa after the passing of his father); Chetty's violin is earthy and understandably wails on 'Death'; and there's a tender nostalgia to 'Yogan', which reflects on his father's life. The music is minimalist but beautiful, taking in contemporary and ambient soundscapes. Throughout, a simple rising motif is twisted and changed through the moods and there's something particularly affecting about the alarming strokes of the violin that cut through the ending of 'Go'.

*ALEXANDRA PETROPOULOS*

TRACK TO TRY *Death*

Lara Wilde

MY WORLD

# Jamz Supernova

***Russ Slater Johnson*** hears from the DJ sharing cutting-edge global and electronic sounds. "I wanted to be your alternative Black show," she confesses

Over the past couple of years Jamz Supernova has emerged as one of British radio's most exciting new DJs and presenters. Her show on BBC 6Music, *Jamz Supernova on 6*, is on every Saturday afternoon, a build-up to those out partying on a Saturday night but filled with a smorgasbord of surprising songs from across the globe, albeit with a strong UK contingent of jazz, beats and dancefloor fillers. One recent show had everything from Meridian Brothers' wonky *cumbia* explorations, Afla Sackey & Afrik Bawantu's Afro-funk, legendary dub outfit Creation Rebel and RAH & The Ruffcats, who are set to be one of the breakout Afrobeat groups of the year.

"The industry doesn't like multi-genre because you can't really pigeonhole it," she says "But that approach, I think, is about how you build a show. Listen to Gilles Peterson… that's how you program a show." It was through Peterson that she got her break on 6Music. "It was lockdown, Gilles took a little sabbatical, [they liked] the stuff that I was doing on [BBC] 1Xtra and they were like 'right, we'll try you out for two weeks,' and that was it."

The story of how Jamz ended up on radio to begin with was one of fortune. "I went with a friend to an open day [at the Brit School, a London school for the performing arts] to have a look around. Then I saw the radio studio. I was like 'this is it.' I spend all my time finding music, I'm always telling my friends about music, I buy mix CDs, make mix CDs, this feels like the perfect place for me to share music… I just applied for it and got in."

> "[Starting a show on BBC 6Music] was the most freedom I'd ever had"

Jamz grew up in South-East London, but her parents were from the Midlands. "They were always really into music." She remembers family gatherings every Friday when she was young. "My uncle and my aunt would come round and they'd all bring different music. So, my uncle might bring the new Alicia Keys CD, we'd dub it in, or they might bring some reggae, and they would constantly be swapping music. Sound system culture is very much at the base of what we listen to."

She started developing her own tastes in unusual places. "You'd get on the bus or be in the hairdressers and someone would come in and sell bootleg CDs. I'd always buy them, and that was from about 11 years old. I remember really getting into Tupac and printing off the lyrics and living on the conspiracy forums. I loved his poetry. It's quite a dark song, but I love 'Brenda's Got a Baby'. Also, 'Changes', a beautiful song of hope . Within Black Lives Matter it was a song that came up quite a lot, but then I also heard it at a fundraiser for Palestine when I was in Melbourne [Australia]. How old is that song and how many instances has it been played as a song of hope and change?"

After her stint at the Brit School, she had a show on Reprezent Radio, a community station now based in Brixton, and simultaneously was working at the BBC as an intern. Her youth spent listening to R&B, UK hip-hop that she discovered through pirate radio, and UK funky (an umbrella term for a number of UK-born club music genres with a focus on groove) all fed into those roles. "I'd work on the *UKG Show*, the *Dancehall Show* [both on BBC 1Xtra, the BBC's station dedicated to Black and urban music], I was working on every single show possible. And I loved MistaJam at the time and his take on being so broad [but] my music taste was maturing out of R&B, into other genres and I remember loving Dub Phizik' 'Marka'. They're from Manchester and it was sort of post-dubstep but the way the guy spat sounded like Jamaican toasting." In 2011 she discovered SoundCloud, an online music platform which allows artists to easily upload and share their songs. "It opened me up to music from around the world," says Jamz, and it sparked an idea. "[I thought] I'm going to take all the music that I'm finding online and make a radio show out of that. During that time, I was coming across people like Sango, who was mixing R&B vocals with *baile* funk beats, then there was Enchufada [a Portuguese label known for global club music]."

She was also careful not to lose her roots in the UK and was an early supporter of music that didn't fit in the urban category. "I wanted to be your alternative Black show. There was so much amazing music in the UK that we were not playing, they're not getting played anywhere on 1Xtra. I wanted to be the person to play them and support them, people like Ezra Collective, Joe Armon-Jones, Children of Zeus, Hak Baker, Greentea Peng. I was quite emboldened."

When she got offered her own 6Music show, she was ready. "I was like, finally, I can put these two worlds together. I can play jazz, I can play something soulful, I can play something from South Africa or Zambia. I can play electronic songs as well. I think with the sixth show, I opened with Afronaut, 'Transcend M.E.', a broken beat song, 20 years old. It was the most freedom I'd ever had."

Jamz' musical universe expanded via a gig with the British Council's Selector Radio which took her to Azerbaijan, Georgia, Zambia, Malawi, Turkey, South Africa and Colombia, and these travels have been reflected in her show, with special episodes dedicated to each country. Colombia left a particular mark; she's returned twice since, visiting Quibdó on the country's Afro-descendent populated Pacific Coast on her last trip. "It was probably the most profound place that I've been in terms of seeing a different side of African culture, seeing how the traditions have been preserved, the oral traditions. Coming from a Black British family and being so disconnected from the Caribbean, to see that, I found it soul enriching. I know what it means to be Black British, I know Jamaican culture surface level, but I don't know the traditions. To go somewhere like Quibdó, it feels a lot closer."

One artist she discovered in Colombia was rapper Verito Asprilla. "She's a good example that you have to be on the ground to learn sometimes. I thought being on the internet discovering something then playing it on the radio was enough [but] to really understand a place, you have to understand the nuances and to do your due, you need to go there. It can't always be this transactional relationship; you need to invest in the community as well."

As well as being the boss of the Future Bounce record label, which is still very active, Jamz has launched *Between the Lines*, an interview-based podcast whose initial guests include Yazmin Lacey, Daudi Matsiko and Ego Ella May: "The idea is one song, we go through the lyrics and then the tangents of where it takes us," she explains, "we break down the lyrics of where they were, who they are, when they wrote that song, the messages behind it or the life experiences, and then we talk about the craft of songwriting as well. It's a bit like therapy."

***+ Between the Lines** is available at https://fanlink.tv/BetweenTheLines*

Alex Lambert

## JAMZ SUPERNOVA'S MY WORLD PLAYLIST

Monica 'For You I Will'
2Pac 'Changes'
Dub Phizik' 'Marka (feat Skeptical & Strategy)'
Sango 'Baile Somebody'
Dotorado Pro 'African Scream (Marimbas)'
Greentea Peng 'Hu Man'
Afronaut 'Transcend M.E.'
Verito Asprilla 'Apoteósica (feat Li Saumet & Cerrero)'
Grupo Saboreo 'La Vamo a Tumbar'
Alexis Play 'Aquí es Así (feat Los Dioses del Ritmo)'

# Abdullah Ibrahim

A South African pianist who navigated the trauma and difficulties of apartheid while always staying close to home. ***Nigel Williamson*** documents a remarkable, boundless career… that's not over yet

That Abdullah Ibrahim is not only still with us in his 90th year but continues to make magisterial music is one of the blessings of our troubled times – as anyone who saw his concert at London's Barbican last year will testify.

The South African pianist whom Nelson Mandela reportedly once called "our Mozart" has been a professional musician for a staggering 75 years since he started his career playing in Cape Town's District Six township in the shadow of Table Mountain.

Due to apartheid, he had to wait until he was 60 before he finally got to see the stunning views over Cape Town from the mountain's top as the cable car was for 'whites only.' He finally got to make the ascent after the ending of apartheid in 1994 and celebrated the occasion in the title-track of his album *Knysna Blue*. '*Through many decades of traumatic experience in South Africa we were denied many things*,' he recited over a haunting Afro-jazz vamp. '*We didn't even know our own country*.'

Yet, if life was hard in District Six where he was born Adolphus Johannes Brand in 1934, the area in which he grew up was also a vibrant musical melting pot. Taking piano lessons from the age of seven, he learnt hymns, gospel songs and spirituals '*from his grandmother… pianist for the local African Methodist Episcopalian church, and his mother, who led the choir*.'

He heard folk musicians singing the traditional Khoisan songs of South Africa's Indigenous peoples and *marabi* dance music spilt out of the *shebeens*. Then there was the swing of US jazz, which made its way to Cape Town on 78s by the likes of Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington via the US sailors whose ships docked in the bay on their way around the Cape of Good Hope.

The sound was eagerly absorbed by township musicians and mixed with local styles to create a unique form of Cape jazz. So entranced by the imported US records was the youthful Ibrahim that his friends nicknamed him 'Dollar'. All his early albums appeared under the name Dollar Brand until he changed his name after converting to Islam at the end of the 1960s.

By the time he was 15, he was making his living playing piano in shebeens, fusing the local styles of marabi and *mbaqanga* with US jazz until he was discovered by the saxophonist Kippie Moeketsi. One of the giants of South African music, Moeketsi introduced him to the piano playing of

Gabriel Bertogg

Thelonious Monk, whose work was to have an enduring influence, and persuaded him to move to Johannesburg to join his band, The Jazz Epistles.

With a line-up that also included Jonas Gwangwa on trombone, Hugh Masekela on trumpet, drummer Makaya Ntshoko and Johnny Gertze on bass, the group's jam sessions in Joburg's Sophiatown became famous and led to 1959's *Jazz Epistle: Verse 1*, the first ever album recorded by a Black South African band.

There was to be no *Verse 2* as The Epistles broke up the following year when Masekela and Gwangwa left to travel abroad with the jazz musical *King Kong*. Ibrahim turned down the opportunity to join them, arguing that he had a musical destiny to fulfil at home and that his place was with his people.

Yet it was not to be, as the apartheid state grew more brutal and violent. In March 1960, 69 defenceless demonstrators were shot dead and many more injured in what became known as the Sharpeville massacre. Martial law was declared, the ANC (African National Congress) political party was banned, and Nelson Mandela would soon be put on trial – and so with a heavy heart, Ibrahim left for Zurich. He was soon joined by fellow Epistles Ntshoko and Gertze and it was there in 1963, while playing as a trio at the city's Africana Club, that Duke Ellington heard the group and swiftly recorded an album with them in Paris.

In 1965, Ibrahim moved to New York, where he played with the likes of John Coltrane and Ornette Coleman, appeared at the Newport Jazz Festival and even led Ellington's orchestra on several dates when the great man was indisposed. Ibrahim was a regular fixture in *DownBeat* magazine's critic polls for decades, testament to his technique and compositional invention and showed how America had taken Black South African émigré musicians to its heart; both Masekela and Miriam Makeba were also making their careers in the US at the time.

Yet for all his immersion in US jazz, Ibrahim's African roots remained fundamental in his playing and by the end of the 1960s the call of home saw him making regular visits back to South Africa, where he recorded some of his finest work, including the 1974 album *Mannenberg is Where It's Happening*. The 14-minute title-track was an eloquent protest against the forced removals from District Six, which was being bulldozed to make way for an upscale whites-only development, and was adopted by the ANC as an unofficial anthem. When the record was smuggled by a lawyer to Mandela on Robben Island, he reportedly remarked on hearing it that "liberation is near."

Sadly, the long march to freedom would take another two decades and after another crackdown in which schoolchildren were massacred in Soweto in 1976, Ibrahim was forced back into exile. He continued to explore the interface between African music and US jazz on albums such as *Africa – Tears and Laughter* (1979), *African Dawn* (1982), *Water from an Ancient Well* (1986) and *African River* (1989) before he was able to return home again following Mandela's release from prison in 1990.

**When the *Mannenberg* record was smuggled to Mandela on Robben Island, he reportedly remarked on hearing it, "liberation is near"**

He has continued to record prolifically ever since, releasing solo piano albums and full band recordings – his last album, *3*, on Gearbox Records, came out in January this year and captured Ibrahim and his trio before and during their 2023 show at London's Barbican. The years have also seen him mourn the passing of his contemporaries Miriam Makeba in 2008, Masekela in 2018, Gwangwa in 2021 and Ntshoko in May 2024... until he became the last of the original generation of great South African jazz musicians.

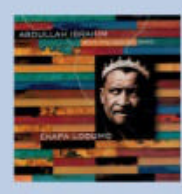
He's still touring and will celebrate his 90th birthday with a series of concerts in Europe this coming October. Let's cherish him while we can. ◆

## BEST ALBUMS

***Mannenberg is Where It's Happening***
(The Sun, 1974)
Spiritual Afro-jazz featuring Ibrahim with a quintet including the great Basil Coetzee on tenor sax. The title-track became an ANC anthem, with Nelson Mandela remarking, "Bach? Beethoven? We've got better," when Ibrahim performed at his inauguration in 1994.

***Africa – Tears and Laughter***
(Enja, 1979)
Recorded in exile, Ibrahim is in prime form on this varied set ranging from meditative solo piano pieces ('The Perfumed Forest Wet with Rain') to the full-on township jive of 'Liberation Dance (When Tarzan Met the African Freedom Fighter)'.

***Knysna Blue***
(Enja, 1994)
A bittersweet set that celebrates South Africa's newfound freedom, but acknowledges the pain and trauma along the way with tributes to those who triumphed over adversity in the townships of Sophiatown and District Six.



***Ekapa Lodumo***
(Enja, 2001)
Recorded in Germany, this is mature Ibrahim in a big band setting. Highlights include 'Mindif', which he composed for the soundtrack of the 1988 film *Chocolat* and the joyous 17-minute tour de force 'African Market'.

***Cape Town Songs – The Very Best of Abdullah Ibrahim***
(Nascente, 2000)
For an overview of Ibrahim's vast catalogue, try this compilation of 14 tracks recorded between 1979 and 1997 arranged chronologically as *'a map of a spiritual, political and musical journey.'*

## IF YOU LIKE ABDULLAH IBRAHIM THEN TRY...

**Moses Taiwa Molelekwa**
***Genes and Spirits***
(M.E.L.T., 2000)
A stellar pianist who also played in Masekela's band, Molelekwa tragically hung himself at the age of 27 shortly after releasing this overlooked classic.

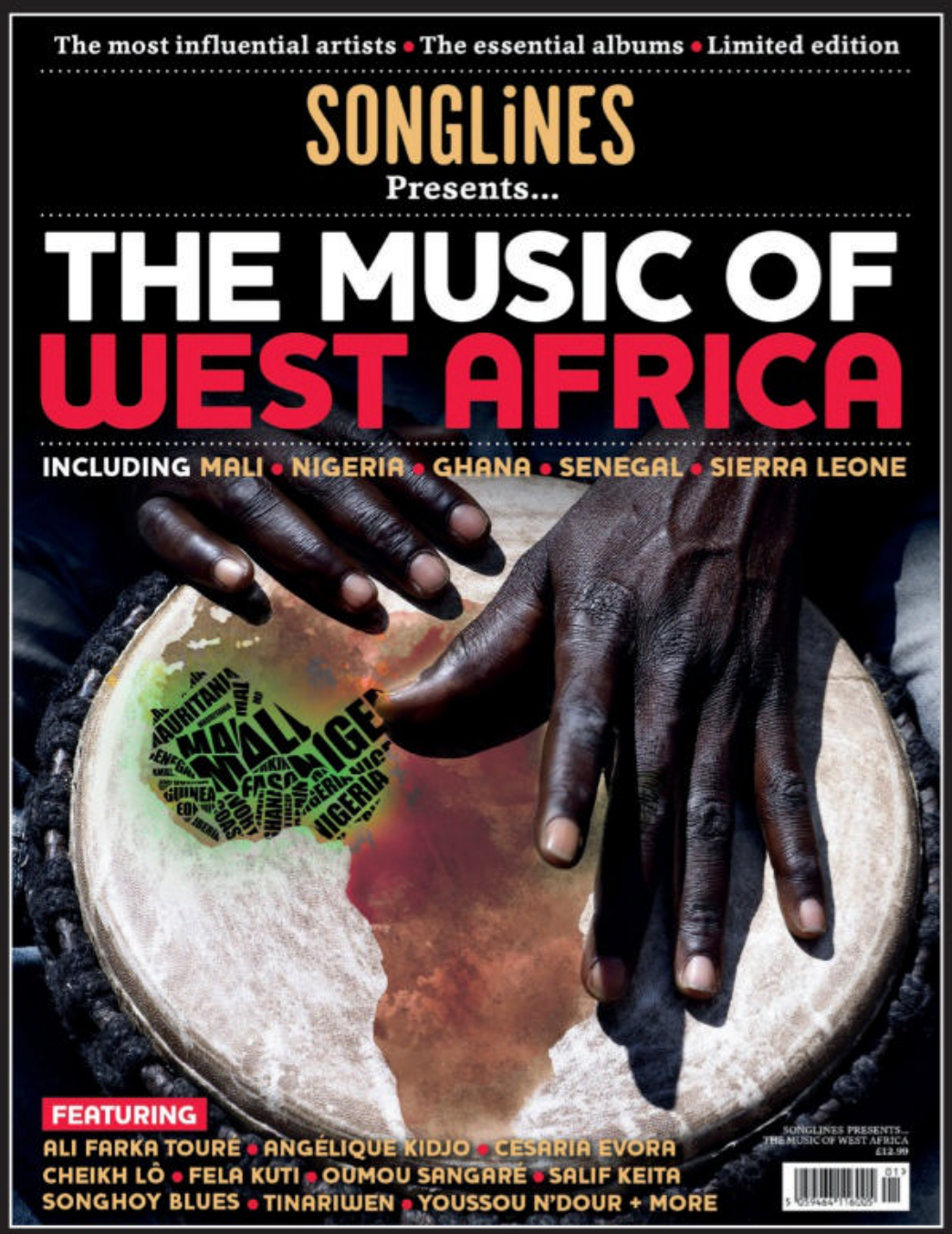
Main picture: Press photo of Ibrahim for his 3 album on Gearbox Records; Bottom right: playing piano in his younger days

*"More wonderful access to fabulous music from Africa courtesy of Songlines"*

Jon Snow, Broadcaster and Journalist

# SONGLINES Presents...

# THE MUSIC OF WEST AFRICA




**Now on sale at all good newsagents**

- **100 pages of stunning content exploring the region's history, musical styles and traditions**
- **Profiles on the countries of West Africa, from Benin to Sierra Leone**
- **Over 170 recommended albums**
- **Select features from the archives**
- **Exclusive opinion pieces**

**Also available to order online for £14.99 at magsubscriptions.com/music-shop or call +44 (0)1722 716997**

Price includes shipping within the UK. Postage will be added to international orders.

# Fes, Morocco

***Evangeline Kim*** shuns her shut-eye to embrace a process of self-transformation at one of the world's most ebullient Sufi happenings

Fez Hamadcha during a *lila* ceremony

Postponed from last year due to the earthquake in Morocco, the 16th edition of the Fès Festival of Sufi Culture, took place April 20-27. Its theme was the Socratic precept '*Know Thyself*', which wove itself brilliantly into the programme through two ideas: self-transformation through higher knowledge and the inner realisation of Sufism's mystical dimensions.

Morocco's abiding Andalusian cultural heritage entwined with Sufi spiritual philosophy, developed over 14 centuries, has resulted in mutually beneficial, intercultural, humanistic values that imbued the festival with an intense, transcendent beauty and grace. And, relatively unknown to the outer world, Morocco's musical ritual ceremony known as *sama*, the practice of 'sacred listening or audition,' was ever-present. Praises and supplications to the divine guided the listener towards spiritual attunement. The sama tradition, widespread throughout North Africa's *turuqs* (Sufi orders/congregations), has specific, subtly differing expressive forms throughout Morocco, with allusions to founder saints. Most carry elements of Andalusian melodies and poetry.

Five elegant Moroccan sama nights took place in the grand Bab El Makina, including the opening concert with Morocco's Yeyya 'Maoulainine', Senegal's Senny Camara, Mauritania's Fatou Mint Engdhey, Oujda's Abdelkadr Ghayt and Fatima-Zahra Qortobi; Fes' favourite sama son Marouane Hajji in concert with Tanzania's Yahya Hussein Abdallah; and the closing sama finale with Syria's Ensemble Taybah and the Whirling Dervishes of Damascus.

The sama rituals and concerts produced states of entrancement known as *wajd*, through deep communal union between the music and the listener. Morocco's sama preserves some of the most beautiful centuries-old Arabic poetry, sometimes transfiguring earthly love to divine adoration. The Al-Andalus therapeutic soul-healing *nuba* music was often embedded in the sama songs. Cascades of polyphonic harmonies and high poetic rapture captivated, culminating in the crowd's mass ululations, singing and bobbing dance.

The lush paradise of Jnan Sbil Gardens hosted smaller concerts by Corsica's moving polyphonic group I Muvrini, the uplifting, spirit-harmonising rhythms of the Maallmat of Meknès and Fatou Mint Engdhey. The Dar Adiyel in the Medina hosted Aurélien Pascal's afternoon concert of Bach's Cello Suites. Later, deep in the night, the tranquility in the Dar changed as the Hamadcha brotherhood conducted a ritual *lila* ceremony that slowly progressed to a frenzied dance of possession.

Rounding out the festival's cultural profile were art exhibits. Dr Sylvie Cady curated and presented a homage to the late polymath Egyptian artist, poet, author and psychoanalyst, Professor Sami-Ali. His vibrant calligraphic paintings, collages, photographs and artworks 'sing' of his love for the great Sufi philosophers. The renowned duo, painter Mohamed Charkaoui and photographer Benjamin Bēni, created a collaborative exhibit along with a workshop. Charkaoui superimposed repetitive lacings of calligraphies on top of layers of Bēni's painted and mixed media, embellishing his photo images to astonishing effect.

Zoubir Ali

Famed actress Amal Ayouch, accompanied by a *qanun* player, presented delightful skits portraying hilarious stories from Sidi Faouzi's new book, *Sagesses et Facéties de JOHA*. The eccentric dervish, also known as Nasreddin throughout the Muslim world from India to Turkey, appeared in Arabic literature as early as the 9th century. Amal's expressiveness, movement and stagecraft were brought to life with charming aplomb by the elevated humour of the anecdotes.

Morocco's great filmmaker Mohamed Abderrahmane Tazi screened his recent gorgeous biopic, *Fatema, La Sultane Inoubliable*. Partially based on Fès-born pioneering feminist Fatema Mernissi's autobiographical *Dreams of Trespass* and her other writings, the film traces her story as an early activist for women's rights in a patriarchal society, her struggles with Islamicist extremists and her unrelenting drive for universal education and a democratic society. The soundtrack is filled with Driss El Maloumi's rippling *oud* and striking sequences of a trance-inducing *moussem* [Sufi festival]. The film has English subtitles and must be shown in Anglophone countries – it's a beauty.

Packed sessions in the Medersa Bou Inania and the Fès-Medina Prefecture featured Sufism's world diversity of illustrious scholars from the US, Pakistan, Australia, Niger, France, the UK and Morocco. They explored with Dr Faouzi Skali, the festival's founder, as lead moderator topics such as *The Andalusian Heritage: What Lessons for the Future*, *Ibn Arabi and Rumi: an Ongoing Dialogue*, and 12th century Andalusian Ibn Toufayl's allegorical tale dealing with human consciousness, *Hayy Ibn Yaqdhân*. There were musical interludes by Françoise Atlan, Abdelkader Ghayt, Albania's Enris Qinami on his *shargia* lute and exceptional female *kora* artist Senny Camara.

Come to the Fès Festival of Sufi Culture every year if you are able. Be part of the enchantment. ◆

JUNE-JULY 2024

# Gig Guide

Noor Bakhsh

## *Songlines* picks...

**Noor Bakhsh** (Jun 28 – Jul 5, On Tour) Innovative, deep rhythms aplenty as the legendary Pakistani *benju* player continues to flourish, late into his career

**Systema Solar** (Jul 9, London) Hard to believe, but this is a London debut for the technicolour Afro-Colombian dancefloor troupe whose debut came out back in 2009

**Gonora Sounds** (Jul 11-28, On Tour) Honed on the streets of Zimbabwe, the talents of blind singer/guitarist Daniel Gonora, his son Isaac and friends are debuting in the UK

**Madalitso Band** (Jul 17 – Aug 8, On Tour) No-one leaves seeing this Malawian duo without a smile on their face; a tour de force in raw and ruthless rhythms

**Nana Benz du Togo** (Jul 24-30, On Tour) Feminist quintet from Togo pairing potent vocals born out of *vodoun* traditions with bumper dance and electronic beats

# LONDON

**15 JUN Divya Ravi** The Bhavan; **18 JUN Seb Stone** Green Note; **Aoife O'Donovan with Guildhall Session Orchestra** Barbican; **19 JUN Femi Oriogun-Williams** Cecil Sharp House; **20 JUN Classico Latino with Omar Puente** PizzaExpress Jazz Club Soho; **20 JUN** & **18 JUL Sarabanda** Queen of the South; **21 JUN Analog Africa** Hootananny Brixton hootanannybrixton.co.uk; **Balimaya Project** Queen Elizabeth Hall Foyer; **Natacha Atlas** PizzaExpress Jazz Club Soho; **Najma Akhtar** Crazy Coqs; **22 JUN Manzanita y Su Conjunto** Jazz Cafe; **Fanna-Fi-Allah** Union Chapel; **Topette!!** Cecil Sharp House; **Eliane Correa & Yadira Ferrer** PizzaExpress Jazz Club Soho; **Shafqat Ali Khan** The Music Room; **23 JUN** [2.30pm] **Emily Portman** Green Note; **Nyboma** Jazz Cafe; **Rishab Rikhiram Sharma** The Bhavan; **24 JUN Emily Portman** Croydon Folk Club; **Rodrigo y Gabriela** KOKO; **25 JUN Haila Mompié y Su Orquesta** Jazz Cafe; **Suntou Susso + Sofia Grant** Dalston Eastern Curve Garden; **26 JUN Dom Flemons** Cecil Sharp House; **27 JUN The Psychedelic World of Cem Karaca** Jazz Cafe thejazzcafelondon.com; **New Regency Orchestra** Scala; **Na-Mara & Daria Kulesh** Uxbridge Folk Club **Derek Gripper** World Heart Beat Embassy Gardens; **28 JUN Something Sleeps** Time & Talents Centre; **Arthur Verocai with Nu Civilisation Orchestra** Barbican; **29 JUN Fania Records 60th Anniversary Celebration** Jazz Cafe thejazzcafelondon.com; **Mayra Andrade** Barbican; **29 JUN** & **28 JUL Mambista in the Park** Brockwell Park Community Greenhouses brockwellgreenhouses.org.uk; **29-30 JUN Al Maqamat Festival** Kings Place kingsplace.co.uk; **1 JUL Once a Fig + Louis Campbell & Dave Malkin** Green Note; **2 JUL Dele Sosimi Quartet + Léa Mondo** Dalston Eastern Curve Garden; **3 JUL Slack Bird** The Harrison; **Borges Machado** Cecil Sharp House; **Mdou Moctar** Electric Brixton; **6 JUL Gülseven Medar Quartet + Arsen Petrosyan, Mehdi & Adib Rostami** Kings Place; **Bitter Blossoms** The Harrison; **8 JUL Patakas** The Harrison; **9 JUL Systema Solar** Village Underground; **Alvorada** PizzaExpress Live Holborn; **10 JUL Dengue Dengue Dengue!** Jazz Cafe; **11 JUL Hanitra** Finnish Church in London; **Gretchen Parlato & Lionel Loueke** Kings Place; **12 JUL** [two shows] **The Budos Band** Jazz Cafe; **Fatoumata Diawara + Amadou & Mariam** Somerset House; **13 JUL Chancha Via Circuito x El Búho** The Fox & Firkin; **Son de Habana** The Portico; **Sanam Trio + Tara Salahi + Makan Ashgvari** Rich Mix; **Hearken Quartet + Duo Gestrikt** Green Note; **Breabach** Irish Cultural Centre; **14 JUL Kate Griffin & Matchume Zango** Aces & Eights; **17 JUL Céu** Jazz Cafe; **18 JUL Mario Bakuna Band** Crazy Coqs; **19-21 JUL IGF Guitar Summit** Kings Place igf.org.uk; **20 JUL The African Concert Series All-Dayer** Wigmore Hall wigmore-hall.org.uk; **The Fantasy Orchestra presents Tropicalia** Union Chapel; **22 JUL Lucy Farrell** Green Note; **26 JUL Margareth Menezes + llê Aiyê** Barbican; **Abel Selaocoe** Wigmore Hall.

**songlines.co.uk/gig-guide All information correct at time of going to press. Email listings for print and online consideration to listings@songlines.co.uk**

# Gig Guide

## SOUTH

**15 JUN St Albans Folk Festival** St Saviour's Church stalbansfolkmusic.org.uk; **15-24 JUN Saltash Songs & Shanties Festival** songsandshanties.co.uk; **16 JUN Daniel Martinez Flamenco Company** Pavilion Dance South West, Bournemouth; **17 JUN Daniel Martinez Flamenco Company** New Theatre Royal, Portsmouth; **20 JUN CROWN** Exeter Phoenix; **Rodrigo y Gabriela** The Mount at Wasing, Aldermaston; **21-23 JUN Teignmouth Folk Festival** teignmouthfolk.co.uk; **22 JUN Granny's Attic** The Acorn, Penzance; **25 JUN Seckou Keita & Bath Philharmonia** The Forum, Bath; **26-30 JUN Glastonbury Festival** Pilton glastonburyfestivals.co.uk; **29 JUN The Unthanks** The Arts At St George's, Beckenham; **Penguin Cafe** Turner Sims, Southampton; **Blowzabella + Garenne** Halsway Manor, Crowcombe; **30 JUN Orchestra of the Swan feat Jackie Oates** Turner Sims, Southampton; **1-7 JUL Sandwich Folk & Ale Festival** sandwich-folk-and-ale.org; **3-7 JUL New Forest Folk Festival** Powells Farm, Plaitford newforestfolkfestival.co.uk; **4 JUL Leveret** Halsway Manor, Crowcombe; **4-8 JUL Elementary Festival** Braziers Park, Wallingford elementaryfestival.co.uk; **6 JUL Kimpton Folk Festival** kimptonfolk.uk; **7 JUL World in a Tent** Nepalese Community Centre, Folkestone equatorfestival.com; **12 JUL Peatbog Faeries** Cheese & Grain, Frome; **12-14 JUL Priddy Folk Festival** Mendip Hills priddyfolk.org; **Tropical Pressure** Mount Pleasant Eco Park, Porthtowan tropicalpressure.co.uk; **13 JUL Southampton Mela Festival** Hoglands Park FREE artasia.org.uk; **14 JUL World in a Tent** Victoria Park, Ashford equatorfestival.com; **18 JUL Mario Bakuna & Tristan Banks** Leconfield Hall, Petworth; **20 JUL World in a Tent** Burgoyne Heights, Dover equatorfestival.com; **Mario Bakuna Band** Corn Exchange, Witney; **Malin Lewis** Pound Arts, Corsham; **21 JUL Folk by the Oak** Hatfield Park folkbytheoak.com; **23 JUL The Wilderness Yet** Dartford Folk Club; **25-28 JUL WOMAD** Charlton Park, Malmesbury womad.co.uk; **26 JUL The Langan Band** The Pigs Nose Inn, Kingsbridge; **26-28 JUL The Cornish Bank Summer Camp** Flushing thecornishbank.co.uk; **27 JUL Mario Bakuna & Tristan Banks** Electric Theatre, Guildford.

## WALES & WEST

**15 JUN Daniel Martinez Flamenco Company** Princess Hall, Cheltenham; **21 JUN Def Mama Def** Neuadd Ogwen, Bethesda; **23 JUN CROWN** Gloucester Guildhall; **Rodrigo y Gabriela** Bristol Beacon; **Fanna-Fi-Allah** St George's Bristol; **25 JUN Dom Flemons** Bristol Beacon; **4 JUL Catrin Finch & Aoife Ní Bhriain** Acapela Studio, Cardiff; **Slack Bird** Exchange, Bristol; **5-6 JUL Stroud Sacred Music Festival** St Laurence Church sacredmusicfestival.org.uk; **5-7 JUL Tonnau Tropical Garden Party** Anglesey tonnaufestival.uk; **5-13 JUL Llangollen Fringe Festival** llangollenfringe.co.uk; **11-14 JUL Folk on the Lawn** Abbey Mill, Tintern folkonthelawn.com; **Folk on the Farm Festival** Brynrefail, Anglesey folkonthefarmfestival.com; **18-21 JUL Sesiwn Fawr** Dolgellau sesiwnfawr.cymru; **19 JUL Malin Lewis** Hermon Arts, Oswestry; **VRï** The Miners', Ammanford; **19-21 JUL Festival at the Edge** Hopton Court, Cleobury Mortimer festivalattheedge.org; **Downend Folk & Roots 10th Anniversary Celebration** downendfolkandroots.com; **22 JUL Seckou Keita & The Homeland Band** Guiting Power Village Halll.

## MIDLANDS

**18 JUN Fanna-Fi-Allah** The Apex, Bury St Edmunds; **21 JUN Akash Parekar** Eastside Jazz Club, Birmingham; **21-23 JUN Lichfield Folk Festival** King Edward School & Sports Centre lichfieldfolkfestival.co.uk; **24 JUN Jackie Oates Trio** St Mary's Church, Stafford; **27 JUN Gnoss** The Barn in Baston; **28 JUN Tara Jaff, Adib & Mehdi Rostami** Warwick Arts Centre; **29 JUN Bury Folk Festival** Nowton Park Walled Garden, Bury St Edmunds buryfolkfestival.co.uk; **30 JUN Gnoss** The Poppy Folk Club, Nottingham; **4-7 JUL Gate to Southwell** Kirklington gtsf.uk; **Folk in a Field** Bradmoor Woods, West Acre folkinafield.co.uk; **Bromsgrove Folk Festival** Bromsgrove Rugby Club bromsgrovefolkclub.co.uk; **4-14 JUL Lichfield Festival** lichfieldfestival.org; **5-7 JUL Maverick Festival** Easton Farm Park, Woodbridge maverickfestival.co.uk; **Timber Festival** Feanedock timberfestival.org.uk; **7 JUL Seth Lakeman** Foxlowe Arts Centre, Leek; **12 JUL Maya Youssef** The Hub at St Mary's, Lichfield; **12-14 JUL Ely Folk Festival** elyfolkfestival.co.uk; **12-15 JUL The Swamp Club** The Flowerpot, Derby thswampclub.co.uk; **13 JUL World & Caribbean Music Festival** Christchurch Park, Ipswich globalrhythm.org.uk; **17 JUL Martin & Eliza Carthy** King's Lynn Corn Exchange; **19-21 JUL Stainsby Festival** stainsbyfestival.org.uk; **20 JUL Sampad's Summer Party** Symphony Hall, Birmingham sampad.org.uk; **25-28 JUL Warwick Folk Festival** Castle Park warwickfolkfestival.co.uk; **Cambridge Folk Festival** Cherry Hinton Hall cambridgelive.org.uk.

## NORTH

**15 JUN The Unthanks** Northern Stage, Newcastle upon Tyne; **15 JUN & 27 JUL Green Island Festival Vols I & II** Hulme Community Garden Centre greenislandfestival.co.uk; **16 JUN Janice Burns & Jon Doran** Victoria Tunnel, Newcastle upon Tyne; **20 JUN Maya Youssef** Howard Assembly Room, Leeds; **The Scorpios** Ramona, Manchester; **21 JUN Rodrigo y Gabriela** Project House, Leeds; **21-23 JUN Beverley Folk Festival** beverleyfolk.com; **Moor & Coast Session** Whitby Rugby Club moorandcoast.co.uk; **22 JUN Juan Martín** Alnwick Playhouse; **Márta Sebestyén** Hallé at St Michael's, Manchester; **22-23 JUN Africa Oyé Festival** Sefton Park, Liverpool FREE africaoye.com; **23 JUN Juan Martín** NCEM, York; **Dom Flemons** St Mary's Centre, Chester; **28 JUN Gnoss** The Greystones, Sheffield; **The Unthanks** Auckland Gardens, Bishop Auckland; **29-30 JUN The All Britain Fleadh** St Helens comhaltas.co.uk; **30 JUN The Unthanks** Unitarian Church, Todmorden; **2 JUL Ana Alcaide** Instituto Cervantes Manchester; **3 JUL Ana Alcaide** NCEM, York; **5 JUL Slack Bird** Toft House, Middlesbrough; **5-7 JUL Cleckheaton Folk Festival** cleckheatonfolkfestival.org; **6 JUL Hearken Quartet + Duo Gestrikt** Alphabetti Theatre, Newcastle upon Tyne; **11 JUL Peatbog Faeries** The Atkinson, Southport; **12 JUL Bitter Blossoms** Cafe#9, Sheffield; **12-14 JUL Furness Tradition Festival** Ulverston Town Centre furnesstradition.org.uk; **Great North Folk Festival** Botton Village, Danby greatnorthfolk.com; **Rothbury Traditional Music Festival** rothburymusicfestival.co.uk; **14 JUL Peatbog Faeries** Settle Victoria Hall; **15-21 JUL GemArts Masala Festival** Newcastle upon Tyne and Gateshead gemarts.org; **20-21 JUL Manchester Mega Mela** Platt Fields Park FREE manchestermela.co.uk; **22-28 JUL Yn Chruinnaght Celtic Gathering** Peel, Isle of Man ynchruinnaght.com.

## SCOTLAND

**15 JUN Peatbog Faeries** SWG3, Glasgow; **Gnoss** The Barn, Banchory; **21-23 JUN Oban International Shanty Festival** oban-shanty.weebly.com; **22-23 JUN Scottish Traditional Boat Festival** Portsoy stbfportsoy.org; **23 JUN Glasgow Mela** Kelvingrove Park FREE glasgowlife.org.uk; **26 JUN Heal & Harrow** The Barn, Banchory; **26-30 JUN East Neuk Festival** eastneukfestival.com; **28 JUN DLÙ** SWG3, Glasgow; **Malin Lewis** The Ceilidh Place, Ullapool; **Heal & Harrow** CatStrand, New Galloway; **29 JUN Heal & Harrow** West Barns Village Hall, Dunbar; **Malin Lewis** An Lanntair, Stornoway; **Mànran** Elgin Town Hall; **4-8 JUL Kelburn Garden Party** Kelburn Castle kelburngardenparty.com; **5-7 JUL Newcastleton Traditional Music Festival** newcastleton.com; **6-7 JUL Blazin' in Biggar** blazininbiggar.com; **11-14 JUL Stonehaven Folk Festival** stonehavenfolkfestival.co.uk; **12-14 JUL Tiree Music Festival** tireemusicfestival.co.uk; **Newton Stewart & Minnigaff Traditional Music & Dance Festival** tradmusic.com; **17-20 JUL HebCelt** Stornoway, Isle of Lewis hebceltfest.com; **19-21 JUL Speyfest** Fochabers speyfest.com; **23 JUL Birdvox** The Glad Cafe, Glasgow.

## IRELAND
### (Republic & Northern)

**21-23 JUN TuneFest** Dungarvan tunefest.ie; **13-28 JUL Earagail Arts Festival** Donegal eaf.ie; **20 JUL Róis & Muireann Ní Shé** NCH, Dublin; **21 JUL Mohammad Syfkhan** NCH, Dublin; **21-28 JUL Belfast TradFest** belfasttraditionalmusic.com; **24 JUL Bixiga 70** Róisín Dubh, Galway; **24-28 JUL Fiddler's Green Festival** Rostrevor fiddlersgreenfestival.com; **25 JUL Bixiga 70** The Sugar Club, Dublin; **28 JUL Lir Folk Festival** The Grand Social, Dublin thegrandsocial.ie

## TOURS

**Noor Bakhsh**
*Virtuoso Pakistani benju player*

**28 JUN** The Cornish Bank, Falmouth; **29 JUN** Glastonbury Festival, Pilton; **30 JUN** The Puzzle Hall Inn, Sowerby Bridge; **1 JUL** [+ Muslim Shaggan]

# Gig Guide

Cafe OTO, London; **2 JUL** [+ Zayn Mohammed] Cafe OTO, London; **3 JUL** The Jam Jar, Bristol; **4 JUL** The Barrel House, Totnes; **5 JUL** Lewes Con Club. *instagram.com/honiunhoni*

### Black Umfolosi
*A cappella outfit from Zimbabwe*

**19 JUN** The Hug & Pint, Glasgow; **20 JUN** Swan Theatre, Worcester; **21 JUN** Wiltshire Music Centre, Bradford-on-Avon; **22 JUN** Symphony Hall, Birmingham; **23 JUN** East Riding Theatre, Beverley; **27 JUN** St George's Church, Clun; **28 JUN** The Welfare, Swansea; **29 JUN** Tolmen Centre, Falmouth; **4 JUL** CatStrand, Dumfries; **5 JUL** Seven Arts, Leeds; **6 JUL** The Vault, Hexham; **7 JUL** The Waiting Room, Stockton-on-Tees; **10 JUL** Pavilion Theatre, Worthing; **12 JUL** Blackheath Halls, London; **13 JUL** Priddy Folk Festival, Wells. *blackumfolosimusic.com*

### Jake Blount
*Black and Native old-time styles*

**14 JUN** Market Place, Armagh; **15 JUN** Strule Arts Centre, Omagh; **16 JUN** The Black Box, Belfast; **19 JUN** Music at the Buildings, Ashington; **20 JUN** St Mary's, Chester; **21 JUN** St George's Bristol; **22 JUN** Marsden Americana & Bluegrass Day. *jakeblount.com*

### The Bookshop Band
*Touring their brilliant new album*

**15 JUN** Spot On Festival, Blackpool; **21 JUN** Rheged, Penrith; **29 JUN** Glastonbury Festival, Pilton; **2 JUL** Malvern Book Cooperative; **3 JUL** Mr B's, Bath; **4 JUL** The Continental, Preston; **5 JUL** House of Friends & Books, Manchester; **6 JUL** [lunchtime] Read, Holmfirth; [eve] St Mary's Church, Kirkby Lonsdale; **7 JUL** UpCo, Otley; **8 JUL** The Book Stop, St Helens; **9 JUL** Press Books and Coffee, Hednesford; **10 JUL** Red Lion Books, Colchester; **11 JUL** National Centre for Writing, Norwich; **12 JUL** NWT Cley and Salthouse Marshes, Norwich; **14 JUL** Heffers, Cambridge; **15 JUL** Paper-works, Lowestoft; **17 JUL** Mostly Books, Abingdon; **19 JUL** The Horton, Epsom; **20 JUL** Astley Book Farm, Bedworth; **21 JUL** Blue Bear Bookshop, Farnham; **22 JUL** Fourbears Books, Caversham; **24 JUL** October Books, Southampton; **25 JUL** Medina Bookshop, Cowes. **26 JUL** Pound Arts, Corsham thebookshopband.co.uk

### The Brothers Gillespie
*Mesmerising Northumbrian duo*

**18 JUN** Crazy Coqs, London; **20 JUN** Temperance, Leamington Spa; **21 JUN** Wetherby Folk Club; **22 JUN** Flowergate Hall, Whitby; **27 JUN** Wesley Memorial Methodist Church, Oxford; **5 JUL** Moorforge Festival, Wigton; **25 JUL** Cambridge Folk Festival; **26 JUL** Ripon Wilfrid's Folk Club, Ripon.*thebrothersgillespie.com*

### Budapest Cafe Orchestra
*Klezmer-Balkan-Russian energy!*

**19 JUN** Crooked Billet, Stoke Row; **20 JUN** The Hub, Lichfield; **21 JUN** Ropetackle, Shoreham-by-Sea; **22 JUN** Yattendon Village Hall; **23 JUN** Hastoe Village Hall; **27 JUN** Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury; **28 JUN** Theatr Colwyn, Colwyn Bay. *budapestcafeorchestra.co.uk*

### Eliza Carthy
*Solo dates from folk royalty*

**16 JUN** Hutton Rudby Village Hall, Yarm; **21 JUN** Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough; **22 JUN** New Vic Theatre, Newcastle-under-Lyme; **24 JUN** Mananan Festival, Isle of Man; **28 JUN** NCEM, York; **29 JUN** The Glasshouse, Gateshead; **30 JUN** The Old Chapel, Robin Hood's Bay; **6 JUL** Kimpton Folk Festival; **27 JUL** Otley Courthouse. *eliza-carthy.com*

### Raghu Dixit
*Indian star launches new album*

**6 JUL** Shepherd's Bush Empire, London; **7 JUL** Cheese & Grain, Frome; **9 JUL** The Brook, Southampton; **10 JUL** Gloucester Guildhall; **11 JUL** Band on the Wall, Manchester; **12 JUL** Button Factory, Dublin; **25 JUL** Cottiers Theatre, Glasgow; **26 JUL** La Belle Angele, Edinburgh; **28 JUL** Cambridge Folk Festival. *raghudixit.com*

### Teilhard Frost
*Outstanding old-time artist*

**19 JUL** The Courtyard, Hereford; **20 JUL** Ropetackle Arts, Shoreham-by-Sea; **21 JUL** Medina Bookshop, Cowes. *tfrostmusic.com*

### Gonora Sounds
*Rapturous rhythms of Zimbabwe!*

**11 JUL** The Full Moon, Bristol; **12 JUL** Love Trails Festival, Swansea; **13 JUL** Bluestone Brewing Company, Newport; **18 JUL** Hootananny Brixton, London; **19 JUL** The Old Malthouse, Chichester; **20 JUL** Jaminaround, Cranborne; **21 JUL** Tolpuddle Martyrs' Festival; **23 JUL** Petworth Festival. *gonorasounds.com*

### Tom Kitching & Marit Fält
*Fiery fiddle and mandola duo*

**14 JUN** Folk on the Farm, near Ashby-de-la-Zouch; **15 JUN** The Lab, Northampton; **16 JUN** Harwich Arts and Heritage Centre; **17 JUN** Green Note, London; **18 JUN** Hyde War Memorial Parish hall, Fordingbridge; **19 JUN** Ashburton Arts Centre, Newton Abbot; **20 JUN** Cygnet Theatre, Exeter. *tomkitching.co.uk*

### Lost Songs of Scilly
*By John Elliott & Piers Lewin*

**14 JUN** St Anne's, Barnstaple; **15 JUN** Ashburton Arts Centre, Newton Abbot; **18 JUN** Pound Arts, Corsham; **19 JUN** Green Note, London; **20 JUN** Lighthouse, Poole. *lostsongsofscilly.com*

### Madalitso Band
*The raw energy of Malawi*

**17 JUL** The Glad Cafe, Glasgow; **18 JUL** Band on the Wall, Manchester; **19 JUL** The Golden Lion, Todmorden; **20 JUL** The Feather Star, Wirksworth; **21 JUL** Forum, Tunbridge Wells; **22 JUL** The Boileroom, Guildford; **23 JUL** Norwich Arts Centre; **24 JUL** Marine Theatre, Lyme Regis; **25 JUL** Lost Horizon, Bristol; **26 JUL** The Cornish Bank Summer Camp, Flushing; **27 JUL** Starry Village, Hereford; **28 JUL** Secret Garden Party, Abbots Ripton; **31 JUL** Hootananny Brixton, London; **1 AUG** Stroud Brewery; **2 AUG** Moseley Hive, Birmingham; **3 AUG** Fanny's Meadow, Secret location in Somerset; **4 AUG** Valley Fest, Chew Magna; **5 AUG** Dalston Eastern Curve Garden, London; **6 AUG** Sidmouth Fringe Festival; **7 AUG** Boomtown, Winchester; **8 AUG** Where Else?, Margate. *banjoboys.com*

### Nana Benz du Togo
*Vodoun for the dancefloor*

**24 JUL** The Old Woollen, Leeds; **25 JUL** Ramona, Manchester; **26 JUL** Deer Shed Festival, Thirsk; **27 JUL** WOMAD, Malmesbury; **28 JUL** The Cornish Bank Summer Camp, Flushing; **30 JUL** Dalston Eastern Curve Garden, London. *nanabenzdutogo.bandcamp.com*

### Alogte Oho & His Sounds of Joy
*Frafra gospel-highlife from Ghana*

**21 JUN** Florence Park, Oxford; **24 JUN** The Crescent, York; **26 JUN** Norwich Arts Centre; **27 JUN** The Cornish Bank Summer Camp, Flushing; **29 JUN** Glastonbury Festival, Pilton; **2 JUL** Colchester Arts Centre; **4 JUL** Bristol Beacon; **5 JUL** Jazz Cafe, London; **6 JUL** Kelburn Garden Party, Largs. *tinyurl.com/r52du3yd*

### Karine Polwart
*Birds'n'brambles, moors'n'myths*

**18 JUN** The Stables, Milton Keynes; **19 JUN** The Stoller Hall, Manchester; **20 JUN** The Fire Station, Sunderland; **21 JUN** Clonter Opera Theatre; **22 JUN** Brewery Arts, Kendal; **13 JUL** Stonehaven Festival. *karinepolwart.com*

### The Spooky Men's Chorale
*From the highlands of Australia*

**28 JUN** Ropetackle Arts, Shoreham-by-Sea; **29 JUN** The Haymarket, Basingstoke; **30 JUN** Olivier Theatre, Oxford; **2 JUL** The Apex, Bury St Edmunds; **3 JUL** The Stables, Milton Keynes; **4 JUL** Lakeside Arts, Nottingham; **5 JUL** Town Hall, Wirksworth; **6 JUL** St James' Church, Louth; **8 JUL** St Paul's, Birmingham; **9 JUL** Leadmill, Sheffield; **10 JUL** The Stoller Hall, Manchester; **11 JUL** Brewery Arts, Kendal; **12 JUL** Assembly Rooms, Edinburgh; **13 JUL** Mackintosh Queen's Cross, Glasgow; **14 JUL** Queen's Hall, Hexham; **24 JUL** The Swan, Worchester; **25 JUL** St George's, Liverpool; **26 JUL** Ludlow Assembly Rooms; **27 JUL** Warwick Folk Festival; **28 JUL** Acapella Studio, Cardiff. *spookymen.com*

### Third Culture Collective
*With British-Tamil singer Ashnaa*

**18 JUN** Jazz Cafe, London; **19 JUN** Band on the Wall, Manchester; **20 JUN** The Wardrobe, Leeds; **21 JUN** Mama Roux's, Birmingham; **22 JUN** The Globe, Cardiff; **23 JUN** Metronome, Nottingham. *thirdculturecollective.co.uk*

### Threaded
*New album from acoustic folk trio*

**15 JUN** The Wardwick, Derby; **26 JUN** Cafe#9, Sheffield; **30 JUN** The Musician, Leicester; **4 JUL** Bristol Folk House; **13 JUL** Seven Arts, Leeds; **14 JUL** Artum, Birmingham; **15 JUL** Green Note, London. *threadedmusic.com*

### Wayward Jane
*Exploring American folk traditions*

**10 JUL** Green Note, London; **11 JUL** Lighthouse, Poole; **12 JUL** St Edith Folk Club, Sevenoaks; **13 JUL** Lichfield Festival; **14 JUL** Cafe#9, Sheffield; **16 JUL** Eastgate, Peebles; **17 JUL** Old Bridge Inn, Aviemore; **18 JUL** An Lanntair, Stornoway; **19 JUL** Las Port Righ, Isle of Skye; **20 JUL** Glenelg and Arnisdale Community Hall; **22 JUL** Glenfarg Folk Club. *waywardjane.com*

### The Zawose Queens
*Tanzanian royalty, see p30*

**22 JUN** Africa Night Fever, Brighton; **23 JUN** Africa Oyé, Liverpool; **29-30 JUN** Glastonbury Festival, Pilton; **5 JUL** Wake The Tiger, Bristol; **11 JUL** Ramona, Manchester; **13 JUL** Tropical Pressure, Porthtowan; **16 JUL** Dalston Eastern Curve Garden, London; **26 JUL** WOMAD, Malmesbury. *realworldrecords.com*

5th-8th
September 2024

Book online or call:
07990
629 203

Bromyard
FOLK FESTIVAL

Oysterband
Spiers & Boden
Fay Hield Trio
+ many many more…

Family friendly folk music festival
Great food + drinks + songs + dance
Buy Evening/Day/Weekend tickets

AIF MEMBER

Book your tickets online today:
www.bromyardfolkfestival.co.uk



BBC
Proms
WEDNESDAY 28 AUGUST • 10.15PM
ROYAL ALBERT HALL

**Tinariwen – The Desert Blues**

All the way from northern Mali, Tinariwen comes to London for a Late Night Prom that combines traditional Tuareg and African music with elements of Western rock and jazz.

**Seats from £10.00***

**BOOK NOW**
bbc.co.uk/proms

Marie Planeille

*(plus booking fee)*



Genticorum

CANADIAN FOLK MUSIC AWARDS — Canadian Folk Music Awards — ENSEMBLE OF THE YEAR

Québecois power trio **SUMMER 2024 UK CONCERTS**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Lewis, Scotland | HebCelt Festival | JULY 19-20 |
| Inverness, Scotland | Eden Court Under Canvas | JULY 21 |
| Stirling, Scotland | Tollbooth | JULY 25 |
| Settle, England | Victoria Hall | JULY 26 |
| Malmesbury, England | WOMAD | JULY 27 |
| Cambridge, England | Cambridge Folk Festival | JULY 28 |

***WWW.GENTICORUM.COM***

FROM *the* GROUND

Cinematic, contemporary and captivating. From the Ground is an ode to nature and its infinite power to heal.

Laura-Beth Salter (Kinnaris Quintet, The Shee) and Ali Hutton (Ross Ainslie & Ali Hutton, Treacherous Orchestra) have come together to create a Scottish soundscaping masterpiece with a powerful message at its core.

NEW ALBUM OUT NOW

FROMTHEGROUND.BAND
AVAILABLE ON BANDCAMP

JULY–AUGUST 2024

# Festival Guide

Cerys Hafana at FOCUS Wales

Neil King

## REVIEW

### FOCUS Wales
**Wrexham, Wales**
**May 8-11**

FOCUS Wales, like many similar events globally, intermingles the facets of showcase, conference and public gigs, the primary aim being to transmit the word on new artists and music. Taking over the swiftly rising north Wales city of Wrexham, this 15th edition presented an impressive number of sets, most limited to 30 minutes of condensed action. There were just a few established bands who were allowed to stretch further, such as Spiritualized and Snapped Ankles. Most artists operated in the rock, pop, electronic or singer-songwriter zones, but there was also a scattering of folk-inclined performers.

Most strongly representing Wales was Cerys Hafana, the singer, harpist and sometime guitarist from Machynlleth, playing in the very suitable location of the central Saint Giles Church. The set snuck in almost imperceptibly, with Hafana singing and intoning to a laptop backing. Harp instrumentals were interleaved, providing variety in the vocabulary, soft and sparse. An ancient Hereford carol appeared, its complex tale unfolded by Hafana, with a chiming backing and cantering harp. Low-volume guitar sought out unusual curlicues on the next song, veering towards basslines. Hafana's triple harp was sometimes flecked with electronic processing, but her core song-sound retained a folkish nostalgia. The tunes and songs have a dramatic, sometimes doomy nature, but Hafana maintained a humorous and communicative casualness with the audience.

Still in the church, the NYC country-folk troubadour Willy Mason further impressed, straight away, on a sheer technical level. With guitar, electric bass and drums firmly amplified, the latter sounded wonderful in the kind of space that can usually provide problems on the ringing clatter front. Mason displayed a masterful restraint, letting his set curve up in its dynamics, his softly pronounced vocal lines exuding emotion and control. His trio lay just at the edge of rockin', as Mason gradually upped his guitar intensity throughout. Mason's songs have a real substance, and this hour-long set was a purely poised pleasure.

Bethan Lloyd appeared on the opening night, singing with *shruti*-box accompaniment. Much of her music involves pulsing electronics, but here at The Parish she revealed her talents as an almost a capella folk singer. Lloyd's voice is particularly powerful, and carried with a glottal holler, up to the rafters, singing in Welsh at first, building up an intensity of vibrato that cut through the chattering crowd. Her voice is often low in range, but can swoop up high, the set concluding with her shruti deepening the drone.

Still in the lively Parish, singer/guitarist/harp-blower CF Boneslum, from nearby Chester, led his heavily amplified swamp/garage blues trio. His hoarse-voiced songs are the greasy, grinding full-deal of devil-and-death-obsessed words and orgiastically ripping solos, emerging from the depths of a Tom Waits fixation. Or perhaps Link Wray and Screamin' Jay Hawkins, seeping with rootsy and hooch-strength narratives.

This is not a global weekender, rather an environment where most musical forms are present, even if in small, powerful doses.

*MARTIN LONGLEY*

# LISTINGS

**June 28 – July 1**
**Llar Trad Fest**
*Asturias, Spain*
***llarfolk.com/en/home***

**July 4-7**
**Clandestino**
*Gothenburg, Sweden*
***clandestinofestival.org***

**July 4-7**
**Rudolstadt Festival**
*Thuringia, Germany*
***rudolstadt-festival.de***

**July 4-7**
**Gate to Southwell**
*Nottinghamshire*
***gtsf.uk***

**July 6-7**
**Afrika Festival Herme**
*Hertme, The Netherlands*
***openluchttheaterhertme.nl/afrikafestival***

**July 8-14**
**Kaustinen Folk Music Festival**
*Kaustinen, Finland*
***kaustinen.net***

**July 8-14**
**Les Suds à Arles**
*Arles, France*
***suds-arles.com***

**July 10-13**
**Les Déferlantes Festival**
*Argelès-sur-Mer, France*
***festival-lesdeferlantes.com***

**July 10-13**
**Riddu Riđđu**
*Gáivuotna-Kåfjord, Norway*
***riddu.no/en***

**July 11-14**
**Winnipeg Folk Festival**
*Winnipeg, Canada*
***winnipegfolkfestival.ca***

**July 12-21**
**Liverpool Arab Arts Festival**
*Liverpool*
***arabartsfestival.com***

**July 17-20**
**Colours of Ostrava**
*Ostrava, Czech Republic*
***colours.cz***

**July 19-21**
**Globaltica**
*Gdynia, Poland*
***globaltica.pl***

**July 19-21**
**Vancouver Folk Music Festival**
*Vancouver, Canada*
***thefestival.bc.ca***

**July 19-27**
**La Mar De Musicas**
*Cartagena, Spain*
***lamardemusicas.cartagena.es/2024/***

**July 20 – August 4**
**Fiest'A Sète**
*Sète, France*
***fiestasete.com***

**July 20-27**
**FMM Sines**
*Sines, Portugal*
***en.fmmsines.pt***

**July 25-28**
**Viljandi Folk Music Festival**
*Viljandi, Estonia*
***viljandifolk.ee/en***

**July 27-30**
**WOMAD**
*Malmesbury, Wiltshire*
***womad.co.uk***

**July 25-28**
**Cambridge Folk Festival**
*Cambridge*
***cambridgelive.org.uk/folk-festival***

**August 1-4**
**Mera World Music Festival**
*Mera, Romania*
***meraworldmusic.com/en***

**August 1-4**
**Pickathon**
*Oregon, US*
***pickathon.com***

**August 1-3**
**Urkult**
*Näsaker, Sweden*
Among theatre and poetry, music programming at this year's festival includes Lena Jonsson Trio, Ndox Electrique and fusion artist Lars-Ánte Kuhmunen.
***urkult.se/en***

**August 2-5**
**Garma Festival**
*Arnhem Land, Australia*
***garmafestival.com.au***

**August 2-17**
**Morgenland Festival Osnabrück**
*Osnabrück, Germany*
***morgenland-festival.com***

**August 2-25**
**Edinburgh International Festival**
*Edinburgh*
***eif.co.uk***

**August 6-15**
**Présence Autochtone**
*Montréal, Canada*
***presenceautochtone.ca***

**August 15-18**
**Green Man**
*Crickhowell, Powys*
***greenman.net***

**August 21-24**
**Tønder Festival**
*Tønder, Denmark*
Dubbing themselves a true music festival, this years line-up includes Western swing band Asleep At The Wheel, Orkney-based quartet Faso, and The South Jutland Symphony Orchestra with Bjørn Eidsvåg.
***tf.dk/en***

**August 22-25**
**Shambala**
*Secret location, Northamptonshire*
***shambalafestival.org***

**ALL FESTIVALS ARE UK UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED*

M Belmellat

# PREVIEW

## Festival International Nuits d'Afrique

**WHEN: July 9-21**

**WHERE: Montréal, Canada**

### What the festival says:

*'From July 9 to 21, 2024, the 38th edition of the Festival International Nuits d'Afrique invites you on a planetary musical voyage, where the cultures of Africa, the West Indies and Latin America meet. Over 700 artists from some 30 countries will be on hand for 13 days in six concert halls, and from July 16 to 21 on the free outdoor site in the heart of Montréal's Quartier des spectacles.'*

### What we said:

*'If you happen to be in Montréal in July and looking for African vibes, sounds and sights, then you can't go far wrong with Nuits d'Afriques Festival. 11 days of the best in African and Afro-Caribbean music, mostly from the Francophone nations of the Caribbean and West Africa. With a mixture of established names and newcomers, there's definitely an appetite for this type of music.' [from Songlines #151, October 2019]*

### Who's playing?

No stone of African music has been left unturned in this year's Festival International Nuits d'Afrique lineup. From Afro-psychedelic group BCUC, Touareg singer-songwriter and guitarist Bombino, to the Senegalese duo Def Mama Def. Also at this year's festival, Chadian group Les Aunties, whose backstory is one to admire, as all nine women joined the group after escaping family violence. But the festival doesn't just stop at showcasing music from one continent: with acts like Reggae Uprising, Brazilian group Samba Canjerê and the city's own Cuban band, Septeto de Montréal.

**ONLINE: festivalnuitsdafrique.com**

# Subscribe to SONGLINES

magsubscriptions.com/music-songlines

subscriptions@markallengroup.com

+44 (0) 1722 716 997

## Your essential guide to the best music from around the world

*Songlines* is the definitive magazine for world music – music that has its roots in all parts of the globe, from Mali to Mexico, India to Iraq. Whether this music is defined as traditional, contemporary, folk or fusion, *Songlines* is the only publication to truly represent and embrace it.

### Why should you subscribe?

- 10 new issues each year delivered straight to your door
- Subscriber-only CD or track downloads with every issue, featuring the best music from around the world
- Expert music reviews and global dispatches
- Access to every issue in our digital archive and 7,500+ album reviews in our online database

## From £58 a year

# Discover the world through music

## Subscribe today at magsubscriptions.com/music-songlines

Stated subscription rate based on Annual Direct Debit payment. Annual subscription rate by credit or debit card is £61.00 for Print; £61.00 for Digital; £61.00 for Reviews; £83 for Digital Club; or £105 for Full Club. Postage and packaging is not included for overseas orders and will be applied at checkout.

For access to the reviews database and digital archive, subscribe to our Full Club or Digital Club packages.

Puthli in Italy (left) and backstage at Summerstage Central Park, New York City, US with Ornette Coleman, 2006 (centre)

# Undeterred by expectations, Asha Puthli had a vision of uniting Indian classical music with jazz, heading to New York and getting a job singing with a free-jazz icon. It was the beginning of an adventurous, incendiary and unparalleled career

Mumbai-born singer, actress and global jazz icon Asha Puthli, 79, has lived a life worthy of several biopics. The daughter of Hindu parents from the Saraswat Brahmin caste, she attended an English-speaking school, trained in Indian classical singing and opera, then studied home economics at university before switching on the radio station Voice of America and going mad for jazz. "I wanted to combine Indian classical music with American jazz and form a third-stream music," says this prototype fusionist from her base in Miami. "Luckily the planets were aligned with my thoughts."

This was the late 1960s. The Beatles were vibing with the Maharishi. But a brown woman performing avant-garde jazz? That just wasn't a thing. That is, until it became 'Asha's Thing' – which is how legendary US producer (and civil rights activist) John Hammond, then head of Columbia music, labelled the four-track EP he was touting to label heads from Puthli, who had arrived in New York after a brief stint as an air stewardess, then on a scholarship with the choreographer Martha Graham ("There were no scholarships for jazz so I went backstage, told her I'd studied Indian classical dance and could combine that into jazz modern dance and I auditioned and got in. It was a means to an end").

Puthli would go on to release ten albums, 25 singles and make numerous outré guest appearances on albums by the likes of Duke Ellington and Lionel Hampton; a jazz and disco icon with a social circle that included Andy Warhol and Mick Jagger, she released a self-titled debut in 1973 and won critical acclaim with 1976's *The Devil is Loose*, particularly for the ethereal 'Space Talk'. The queen of comebacks, she's been sampled by everyone from Jay-Z to 50 Cent and found favour with UK tastemaker Gilles Peterson; this year she plays festivals including Glastonbury and We Out Here. None of which would have happened were it not for her big break: Puthli and her malleable but just-so vocals feature on *Science Fiction*, the cult 1972 album by free jazz icon Ornette Coleman.

"So, I'd recorded these four tracks mixing Indian classical music and jazz for John Hammond, and he rang Clive Davis who was looking for a singer for Ornette," remembers Puthli. "Clive had wanted Gina Raven… Ornette's music was a form of free-form jazz, a totally different kind of jazz music, a form called 'harmolodics.' John just told me to go into the studio and try out because he said I could sing anything… People from *Rolling Stone* and *DownBeat* were there, all backstage looking to see if I could sing over the music of this great man. What I had to do was all very improvised. But you know, I had such a bond with Ornette, he was an incredible person. I felt very free, holding my strength and creativity but also at one with sharing and being cohesive. His musicians were amazing. I sang on two tracks, 'What Reason Could I Give' and 'All My Life'; Ornette had this concept of Black future music as a way of projecting the centre of gravity almost outside the music."

"I have a four-octave range from my classical training and I just went for it, this spaced-out singing. I really felt an affinity between Indian classical forms and jazz. The whole thing was about the improvisation. The minor chords, the free form, the liberalness about the art. Also, that it came from a repressed people, from the Black American experience. I think deep down I related because women were also repressed creatures. Not that I ever felt I was being held back in any way; I just went against what was expected of me. I was probably meant to have an arranged marriage as happens in Indian families but I heard that jazz music on the radio and I knew I had to do something bigger with my life. I ended up following my dream to move to New York and playing with the best, as in Ornette, but it was only after I went to the UK that I got a recording contract after appearing on a TV show called *Russell Harty Plus*. I took my American influences and recorded a number of covers that I made my own, with a number of different UK producers and musicians. I loved the whole Swinging London thing, Carnaby Street, Kings Road. The clothes! I used to wear mini saris or dress like a man in a French suit, carrying a cigar for fun. I owe a lot to Ornette, who was a truth-teller. Sometimes, when we were talking, there was so much purity in his thoughts that a tear would come to my eye." ***As told by Jane Cornwell***

Janu Alain Goldschmidt; Angelo Delegio

*Join us for the final fling at Glemham Hall before we move to pastures new*

# FOLKEAST FESTIVAL

16TH 17TH 18TH AUGUST 2024 IN SUFFOLK

## FEATURING THE DHOL FOUNDATION KRIS DREVER BAND GIGSPANNER BIG BAND KATHERINE PRIDDY BASKERY BLOWZABELLA

THEN THERE'S MORE ... ANGELINE MORRISON BAND FAY HIELD TRIO TRACK DOGS JIM MORAY BAND GRANNY'S ATTIC MARTIN CARTHY & JON WILKS MELROSE QUARTET THE DRYSTONES GEORGE BOOMSMA BAND FOLK DETECTIVES MISHRA NICK HART & TOM MOORE RAG MAMA RAG PAPER SPARROWS HEDERA SARAH SMOUT WINDJAMMER HONEY & THE BEAR JENNIFER REID WISE WOMEN THE KING DRISCOLLS JOHN ROW & HUGH LUPTON THE BLOOMFIELD BAND

OH, AND EVEN MORE ... THE TRADFOLK SUNDAY TAKEOVER. INCLUDING MADDIE MORRIS, LOUIS CAMPBELL & OWEN SPAFFORD, GOBLIN BAND, HOLLY CLARKE. PLUS MORE TO BE ANNOUNCED! BRAND NEW WORK FOR FOLKEAST 2024: 'RHYTHMS OF MIGRATION' PRESENTED BY FREEDOM TO ROAM & BALLET FOLK, 'PETERLOO' - SEAN COONEY & SAM CARTER, 'WAKEFIRE' - LADY MAISERY, JIMMY ALDRIDGE & SID GOLDSMITH THE MIGHTY BOSS MORRIS MAKE A WELCOME RETURN TO THE MORRIS STAGE AND IF YOU FANCY PUTTING ON YOUR DANCING SHOES WE'VE GOT BLOWZABELLA, TOPETTE!!, BOF!, BROWN BOOTS BOOGIE, ELVIS FONTENOT & THE SUGAR BEES, SILVER STREET, AND THE THURSDAY NIGHT ANNIVERSARY CEILIDH, WITH STUMPY OAK.

AS ALWAYS EXPECT WORKSHOPS & BOOK CLUBS, YOGA & DANCING LIGHTS, YOUTH MOOT & LITTLE FOLK, ART ARCADE & INSTRUMENT MAKERS, THE VINTAGE MOBILE CINEMA & THE MUSEUM OF ROADSIDE MAGIC, BIG CHAIRS, BIG TALKS, RUMMAGE TENT, POETRY SHED, JACKALOPES & OTHER CURIOSITIES.

EXPLORE MORE AT FOLKEAST.CO.UK JOIN THE STORY

# Eliza Carthy's NEWS OF THE WHIRL

## Eliza cites her least and most favourite soundtracks and airs her frustration with those out of time with their accompanying stories

When it comes to just how much of a pedant you are in your love of the less-beaten music path, are you a glass half-full or half-empty person? Do you delight or despair in knowing you're right?

When I was younger and therefore more principled and unpleasant (but much better looking), I was fond of throwing out the odd angry rant (angry fax, angry carrier pigeon) about whatever poorly-researched drama set in olden times had managed to get their music choices wrong for their period.

These days I'm happier about my inherent hypocrisy; I find it quite funny. I had one special television show in my heart (before I discovered Bruce Willis) that no pedantry could touch. That was HTV's *Robin of Sherwood*, starring Michael Praed (sorry Jason Connery, but it wasn't the same when he left), and featuring music by the one and only Clannad.

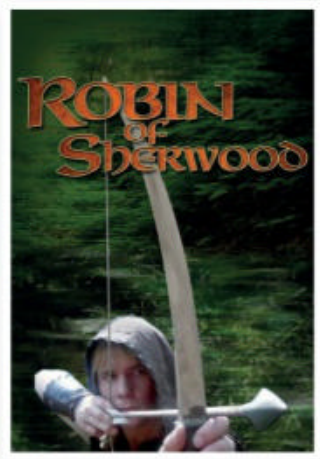
To give my pre-teenage lusts a small amount of credit, the series was widely praised and won awards. It was without whimsy, barring the odd misty low whistle, and shot in woodland locations that looked like the woods adjoining our farm, where we played with bows and arrows, with unfrilly Pagan undertones and genuinely evil bad guys.

Of course, as I got older, the music did begin to bother me. Not because it wasn't evocative and excellent, just that it was very Irish. By the time I was hitting my teens, I was playing music from my area and was fully aware that the English lagged behind in even being considered for that kind of show, as mostly they still do.

Turns out I wasn't the only one thinking it. A chance conversation at a festival with Moya Brennan, Clannad's harpist and lead singer, let me know that despite understandably taking the job, the band felt the same way.

Moya described to me growing up, in a family band like me, but in Donegal (her parents and famous sister Enya, plus several other siblings and family). She was most keen to stress to me that, aside from the trad music, Clannad took many cues for their modern interpretations and further sonic exploration from English bands, and they were surprised and saddened that none of their English heroes were offered the job of providing the soundtrack to England's outlaw. No

**Hitting my teens [and] playing music from my area [I] was fully aware that the English lagged behind in even being considered for [shows like *Robin of Sherwood*]**




Fairport Convention, no Pentangle, no Steeleye. She was almost apologetic.

Not her fault of course! The English still lag, despite notable efforts in recognising what we have and what we could do with it.

This conversation came to mind again when I encountered *Renegade Nell*, a Disney adventure series about a young highwaywoman in England in the 1700s.

I was ready to love it. But ten minutes in and a fight scene seemingly involved every ethnic-sounding music except English, followed by sub-Zimmeresque jiggy (no jigs back then) chase music so persistent that I had to force myself to get to the end of the story, I was so angry. And while I adore Nick Cave his inclusion was – I'm sorry – depressingly inevitable. Don't get me started on the street vendors' musical number!

How, for anachronism's sake, do we cheer ourselves up? Firstly by acknowledging again my willingness to disagree with myself! I have zero problem with Sofia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette*. Rock the punk soundtracks, because they're not trying to evoke something that didn't exist!

Likewise, there was the odd inaccuracy in Tim Key's *The Witchfinder*, but I was delighted at the recurring use of 'The Well Below the Valley', sung unaccompanied and, gasp!, perfectly appropriate – floods of gratitude.

Lastly, I turned to Matt Quinn, Sheffield resident, melodeon player/singer and the young folk scene's resident film expert. He appeared in the new live-action *The Little Mermaid*, and has his favourites, least and most.

"I like the unexpected ones", he says, and names the 1980 film *The Long Riders*, in which Keith Carradine sings 'The Girl I Left Behind Me'. Thanks, music supervisor Ry Cooder! And you're forgiven for 'I'm a Good Old Rebel', which wasn't around until 1915…

Bill Nighy gives a lovely, surprising performance of 'Wild Mountain Thyme' in the 2017 Dunkirk film *Their Finest*.

Matt is also fond of Hugh Williams in the 1935 version of *David Copperfield*, in which James Steerforth (the cad!), at the party at which the young Emily falls for him, sings 'The Outlandish Knight'.

Least favourite?

"As much as I love Emily Blunt, her rendition of 'Wild Mountain Thyme' in the appalling film of the same name, complete with terrible fake Irish accent."

Matt Quinn co-hosts *In the Roud – A Folk Song Podcast*, in association with Sing Yonder. He plays with George Sansome, and his new band is Culverake. ◆

**ABOUT ELIZA**

Born into a musical dynasty – her mother is Norma Waterson of The Watersons and her father is influential singer and guitarist Martin Carthy – Eliza Carthy is one of the most recognisable faces in British folk music.

SONGLINES
ESSENTIAL
10

# BIG BAND REVIVAL

There is nothing quite like the sound of a whole room of people playing music, reflected in the countless times that an oversized genre once seemed lost has risen from the ashes. Here are a few ensembles from the past years that prove the size of your band counts

## 01 Džambo Aguševi Orchestra
Brasses for the Masses
(Asphalt Tango Records, 2020)

If anyone is taking Balkan brass into the future then it's Macedonia's Džambo Aguševi and his band, who hoovered up awards in Eastern Europe before releasing this declaration of intent. The opening track features a rap from Aguševi, there are elements of ska and covers of songs by French guitarist Mathias Duplessy, so it's not the most traditional of sets, but if the *raison d'être* is to soundtrack the party, then mission accomplished. *RUSS SLATER JOHNSON*

## 02 Mestizo
Mestizo
(Mais Um, 2023)

Established by Steam Down's Ahnansé and the founder of Colombia's Mambo Negro Records, Daniel Michel, the self-titled album from this 14-strong ensemble melds the traditions of Colombian folk music with contemporary hip-hop and jazz. With the danceability of *cumbia*, improvisation of jazz and MCs versing in both Spanish and English, this is an ensemble that connects culture, language and music from opposite sides of the world. *IZZY FELTON*

## 03 Lagos Thugs
Chaos
(Immensum, 2024)

Opening with 'Kalakuta President', the Lagos Thugs declare their interests in Afrobeat from the off. And they more than do Fela Kuti justice. Mischievous, electric brass carries each track along, weaving between rhythmic vocals. While tackling serious topics, the Thugs aren't afraid of being playful – listen out for the buoyant 'New Improved Elephants', named after a Lagos detergent, urging listeners to cleanse the country of corruption. A pleasure from the cutting 'Kalakuta President' through to the quieter, more instrumental-focused closer, 'Innocent Blood'. *EMMA RYCROFT*

## 04 Nakibembe Embaire Group
Nakibembe Embaire Group
(Nyege Nyege Tapes, 2023)

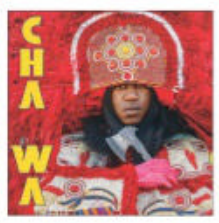
Instead of 'big band,' read 'big instrument'. The *embaire* is an immense xylophone played by up to eight people, and Nakibembe, whose numbers swell to 27 members, are one of few remaining practitioners. Hailing from Uganda's Busoga Kingdom they improvise hypnotic polyrhythms with vocals and shakers to create truly transcendental music, and are joined on three tracks here by an Indonesian trio, Gabber Modus Operandi & Wahono, when things get even more interesting. *ERIN COBBY*

## 05 Orquesta Akokán
Orquesta Akokán
(Daptone Records, 2018)

Established in 2018, Orquesta Akokán's debut feels like a time capsule, recalling mambo big bands from the previous century. Which no doubt was the intention when they recorded this live during a three-day session at the state-run Estudios Areito in Havana. Akokán is Yoruba for 'from the heart,' fitting, as this record feels it too. *IF*

## 06 Minyo Crusaders
Echoes of Japan
(Mais Um, 2019)

There are now many big *cumbia* bands worldwide but one of the most radical has to be Japan's Minyo Crusaders who unite a love for groove, evident in their use of rhythms from cumbia and boogaloo as well as from Africa and the Caribbean, with the *min'yō* folk songs that they grew up with. Tracks like 'Kushimoto Bushi (Cumbia)' and 'Yasugi Bushi (Bolero)' embody dual identity. *RSJ*




## 07 Cha Wa
Spyboy
(UPT Music, 2018)

Cha Wa describe themselves as a '*New Orleans brass band-meets-Mardi Gras Indian outfit*' and it's hard to put it any better. *Spyboy* is an explosion of all the brass squeals and twists New Orleans is known for, replete with steady, funk-riddled bass and joyous, full-volume vocals and chorus. 'Cha Wa' and the rolling 'Geechie Boom Boom' are highlights. The jubilation is closed with a soulful, pared-down 'I'll Fly Away', an off-kilter, all-too-short take on the classic. *ER*

## 08 Nubiyan Twist
Find Your Flame
(Strut Records, 2024)

A London-based nine-piece that blend jazz, Afrobeat, Latin and dance sounds, Nubiyan Twist have outdone themselves on their latest. Versatile at its core, in both the influences it draws from and the languages featured, collaborations with Seun Kuti and Nile Rodgers take this work to the next level. *EC*

## 09 Meute
Empor
(TUMULT, 2024)

Germany's Meute play techno classics using drums, brass and a xylophone. With UNESCO recently adding Berlin's techno scene to the country's list of intangible cultural heritage, can we begin saying that electronic music is an important part of German tradition? The evidence would be these lot, who take techno to the street with songs full of personality that build to euphoric highs and wouldn't be out of place at Rio carnival. *RSJ*

## 10 KermesZ à l'Est
Octophilia
(KermesZ à l'Est, 2023)

If you're after a little anarchy from your Balkan brass, then these eight Belgians are your ticket. Balkan melodies are at the heart of what they do, but they veer off into moments of dub, math rock and their take on an overture from baroque composer Jean-Baptiste Lully. Remarkably it all holds together, but then behind their anarchic imagery, these lot are very good musicians. *RSJ*

# SHREWSBURY FOLK FESTIVAL

23-24-25-26 AUG 2024

## Plus 12 Dance Bands

- Ladysmith Black Mambazo
- Elkie Brooks
- Gangstagrass
- Mary Black
- Eric Bibb
- Ward Thomas
- Jacqui McShee's Pentangle
- Beth Nielsen Chapman
- Mànran
- Mary Gauthier
- The Longest Johns
- Peatbog Faeries
- El Pony Pisador
- The Sentimentals & friends
- The Wandering Hearts
- Le Vent du Nord
- Kathryn Tickell & The Darkening
- Dream in Colors
- The Celtic Social Club
- London Afrobeat Collective
- Bella Hardy
- The Pleasures
- Suntou Susso Band
- HEISK
- Ranagri
- The Hello Darlins
- Joshua Burnell Band
- The Magpies
- NATI
- The Hunch
- Sidiki Jobarteh Trio
- Rosie Hood Band
- James Delarre & Saul Rose
- Lady Nade
- Joli Blon
- Winter Wilson
- Suntou Susso (solo)
- Mazula
- Anthony John Clarke
- The Lost Notes
- The 309s
- Roswell
- Patakas
- Al O'Kane
- Dan the Hat

- Real ale, wine & cocktail bars
- Food village
- Craft fair
- Camping & glamping
- Ceilidhs
- Morris & dance teams
- Workshops
- Singarounds & sessions

refolkus
Youth Festival

P@ndemonium!
Children's Festival

Day & weekend tickets

shrewsburyfolkfestival.co.uk

# ROBERT PLANT

presents SAVING GRACE *Featuring Suzi Dian*

## BLUE ROSE CODE'S CALEDONIAN SOUL CAVALCADE
## CAPERCAILLIE ★ FANTASTIC NEGRITO
## LARKIN POE ★ NITIN SAWHNEY
## OYSTERBAND ★ PEGGY SEEGER *and Family*
## RALPH McTELL ★ TALISK
## TRANSATLANTIC SESSIONS ★ TURIN BRAKES

UK Folk LEGEND SLOT

US Folk LEGEND SLOT

*Exclusive UK Festival appearance!*

**PLUS!**

ALLISON DE GROOT & TATIANA HARGREAVES ★ AOIFE O'DONOVAN ★ BESS ATWELL
BIRDVOX ★ BUTLER, BLAKE & GRANT ★ DANI LARKIN ★ DARLINGSIDE
DEAN OWENS & THE SINNERS ★ FARA ★ FLAMY GRANT ★ GENTICORUM
HACK-POETS GUILD ★ JEREMY DUTCHER ★ JERRY DOUGLAS ★ JON MUQ
KATHERINE PRIDDY ★ THE LANGAN BAND ★ LEYLA McCALLA ★ LIZZIE NO ★ LOCARNO
MEC LIR ★ MICHAEL McGOLDRICK, JOHN McCUSKER AND JOHN DOYLE ★ MITSUNE
NIALL McCABE ★ NORA BROWN & STEPHANIE COLEMAN ★ THE PAPERBOYS
RAGHU DIXIT ★ RÍOGHNACH CONNOLLY & HONEYFEET ★ RUM RAGGED ★ SANGJARU
SARAH HAGEN ★ THE SMITH & BREWER BAND ★ TAYLOR McCALL ★ TOMMY EMMANUEL

*Lots to enjoy including*

FABULOUS STAGES ★ BEAUTIFUL PARKLAND SETTING ★ CAMPING ★ KIDS' ACTIVITIES
MUSIC WORKSHOPS ★ SILENT CEILIDH ★ TALKS ★ SUNDAY FAMILY SHOW ★ YOGA & WELLNESS CLASSES
TRADERS' TENTS ★ FOOD STANDS & MUCH MORE!

Cambridge Folk Festival
ESTD. 1965

CHERRY HINTON HALL
25-28 JULY
2024

GET YOUR TICKETS HERE!

DAY TICKETS FROM JUST £35

WWW.CAMBRIDGEFOLKFESTIVAL.CO.UK